


MARY THE THIRD
"OLD LADY 31"
A LITTLE JOURNEY

RACHEL CROTHERS

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MARY THE THIRD
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THREE PLAYS BY
RACHEL CROTHERS



NEW YORK
BRENTANO'S
Publishers

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC.
BINGHAMTON AND NEW YORK

TO THE AMERICAN THEATRE

There is said to be no school of American playwriting. The time when this may come, we are told, will be when we have stopped imitating and borrowing from our foreign friends who are older at the craft than we, but I am wondering if that time has not stolen upon us before we are aware.

Here and there unmistakably fine writing stands out, intrinsically American in feeling in thought and in workmanship. Just what the Americanism is one cannot put into words.

Our theatre is always so full of foreign plays, we are so close to and interwoven with foreign products, so impartially interested in the foreign thing, so indifferent, both as an audience and as a theatre, as to whether the thing be our own or another's, so long as we find it to our liking, that it is difficult to put one's finger on just what makes the American play American. But when one goes to other countries in search of the drama one is suddenly very surely aware that there is at home something *different* and something of which one may be very proud, something that is deeply, vitally and inherently American.

If America is not yet aware of this it is not to be wondered that Europe is not and that the average English comment on American plays is—"Oh yes, we like them awfully—guns and plots and things—awfully

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clever"; while the French attitude is still more amusing—"There *are* no American plays."

We seem to Europe a very long way off—a crude vast continent, vaguely somewhere, filled with rich noisy people who could not possibly have an art of their own.

And again I'm wondering if that art is not already here—made up of the brilliant individual acting on the American stage, the extravagantly lavish method of production and the best of American plays. And when we shall have learned to be as extravagant in time and patience as we are in other things—when we shall have become less restless both as an audience and as a workshop and when we are willing go more slowly and deeply into the limitless possibilities of dramatic art—then indeed the American Theatre will be known and felt, and be a power among the theatres of the world.

If, being younger, we have fewer great plays than other nations, we are not at least without a few peaks which stand out boldly, but it is our mediocrity which is better than other mediocrity and which is the earmark of the American Theatre.

The commonplace thing with us has a freshness and a swiftly moving, entertaining quality which the average play lacks in other countries.

The *great* thing is always individual,—whatever soil it springs from, but our general rank and file of play writing has more individuality and variety than the same class of foreign plays. They are far less marked by a formula or pattern, far less limited in subject matter, and if they are not always sustained at their best, there is very often in them something of startling merit full of the rich material out of which,

PREFACE

from our great mediocrity,—finer things are to come.

Above all the unconsciousness of the American Theatre—its utter lack of pose—is its charm and its strength.

The great center of theatrical activity known as Broadway, through which many many millions of dollars are poured every year, and into which so much vitality and adventure and reckless expenditure of personality and ability surges and struggles—this great maelstrom of the theatre which attracts and draws into it the plays and the actors of all other nations—this octopus—is very modest about itself.

It is too busy within itself, too intent upon its own great outpouring of production, to care or to stop to consider what the rest of the world thinks of it, and it is so hospitably open minded and open doored to the products of other countries, so ready not to imitate but to be stimulated by them, that it is growing in leaps and bounds—faster and further than it realizes—and is very near the goal of great creative achievement.

I dedicate this book of three American plays to the American Theatre in admiration and appreciation of the fine material I have had to work with in that theatre, in the production of my own plays.

July 12, 1923.

RACHEL CROTHERS.

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MARY THE THIRD
A COMEDY IN PROLOGUE
AND
THREE ACTS

THE ORIGINAL CAST

WHICH OPENED AT THE 39TH ST. THEATRE, NEW YORK,
FEBRUARY 5TH 1923

MARY THE FIRST . . . 1870 . . . LOUISE HUFF
WILLIAM BEN LYON

MARY THE SECOND . . 1897 . . LOUISE HUFF
ROBERT BEN LYON
RICHARD WILLIAM HANLEY

MARY THE THIRD . . 1923 . . LOUISE HUFF
MOTHER BEATRICE TERRY
GRANNY MAY GALYER
FATHER GEORGE HOWARD
BOBBY MORGAN FARLEY
LYNN BEN LYON
HAL WILLIAM HANLEY
LETTIE MILDRED MCCLEOD
MAX JOHN A. KIRKPATRICK
NORA ELINOR MONTELL

PROLOGUE

MARY THE FIRST

TIME: 1870.

The stage is hung in dark curtains, the center is lighted and the figures which walk into the light are framed by darkness.

An old mahogany sofa, upholstered in black hair cloth, is the only furniture in the scene.

A girl of twenty sits on it—dressed in an evening gown of the period. The skirt voluminous with ruffles and lace. Her arms bosom and shoulders are bare—but the fashion of her hair is demure and maidenly with the proverbial curl and rose.

She fans nervously with her diminutive fan, waiting and watching. She is soft and pretty and flower-like. Her voice is sweet. Shyness and modesty are her manner. Her movements are graceful and coy and mincing—full of a conscious charm.

An orchestra from a seductive distance is playing an enticing polka.

A tall good-looking fellow of twenty-five—in the evening dress of the period—comes quickly into the scene.

MARY. Good gracious! How did you know I was here?

WILLIAM. You told me you would be.

MARY. I didn't! The idea of you thinking such a thing!

WILLIAM [*Heavy, honest and simple minded*] I thought you said as soon as you finished that dance with Hiram, you'd come in here.

MARY. I may have said I *might* but I didn't say I *would*.

WILLIAM. Well, I hoped you would.

MARY. Where's Lucy? I didn't suppose you'd be looking for *me* when you were dancing with *her*.

WILLIAM. I finished.

MARY. Aren't you going to dance this one with her? It's your favorite polka and *now* no one in the world dances the polka so well as Lucy, of course.

WILLIAM. No one but you.

MARY. Oh, that's what you *used* to say. But you can't say that any more. Go on. Don't keep her waiting.

WILLIAM. Who's waiting for *you*?

MARY. I won't tell you.

WILLIAM. It's Hiram. How many times have you danced with him?

MARY. How do I know?

WILLIAM. Every other dance. Is this his, too?

MARY. I'm not dancing with anybody this time. I'm just sitting here resting. It's so sweet and quiet. Listen! Isn't the music sweet? I shall always think of you, William, when I hear that music. We've danced to it so many, many times. Oh, I oughtn't to have said that.

WILLIAM. Why not?

MARY. I mustn't say those things now. And you

must go. There mustn't be any more of these sweet little stolen moments under the stairs. This is really good-bye, William, isn't it?

WILLIAM. No, it's not. Unless *you* want it to be.

MARY. Oh, *me!* Don't say me. What have I to do with it?

WILLIAM. Everything. It all depends on you whether it's good-bye or not.

MARY. Then of course it's good-bye. Dear, dear little Lucy! I hope you'll be happy with her, William. Good-bye. [*Giving him her hand daintily, and drawing it away at once.*]

WILLIAM. What are you goin' on like this for? Nothing's going to be any different for you and me.

MARY. Oh, do you suppose for a minute she'll ever let you dance with me again?

WILLIAM. She can't help herself.

MARY. Oh, you don't know her—as I do. I love Lucy very, *very* dearly. She doesn't mean to be—

WILLIAM. What?

MARY. Nothing. I ought not to have said that.

WILLIAM. Said what? What are you hiding?

MARY. Oh, I'm not *hiding* anything about Lucy. Good gracious! I wouldn't have you think *that* for anything. Oh dear. Oh dear! Rather than have you think that, I'll tell you right out what was on my mind. I only meant that under her sweet little purring ways, she's very, *very* strong and stubborn and always gets what she wants. She won't let you be my dear old friend any more. She's been very cold to me lately and there can't be any reason for it unless it's because she doesn't like you to like me—even a little bit.

WILLIAM. She can't stop that.

MARY. You mustn't say that. It's all over now.

WILLIAM. It never would have been over if you hadn't preferred Hiram and his money.

MARY. Oh, don't blame me. But it *is* over. So let's not talk about it. Let's just be happy for a moment here . . . in this sweet little corner where we've sat so many, many times.

WILLIAM. We'll sit here again sometimes, too. [*Trying to take her hand which she finally allows him to do after a modest struggle.*]

MARY. Oh, never, *never!* I'm not that kind of a girl. You ought to know that, William. You ought to know that I will be loyal to Lucy always—above everything. Nothing shall ever dim my devotion to her. Dear, dear little Lucy! I must be true to her.

WILLIAM. What about being true to me? You can't throw me away like an old shoe—just because I'm getting married. I'm not going to throw you away, let me tell you.

MARY. Oh, but you're a great, big, strong man. You can do as you please and still control your feelings. I'm only a weak little thing. I wouldn't dare try to go on seeing you after you are married. I might not be able to hide my feelings.

WILLIAM. Hide what feelings? What kind of feelings have you got for me, Mary?

MARY [*Turning away and brushing a tear from her cheek*] No kind. Good-bye, William! You must go.

WILLIAM. I won't go until you tell me just what you mean and just how you're feeling.

MARY. No— No—it's too late.

WILLIAM. It's not too late. I'm not tied up yet. We can change things.

MARY. Oh, no—no—Lucy!

WILLIAM. I've got more money than Hiram has now. More than he ever will have. Granddad left me rich, Mary. I'm a rich man now. If I thought you still cared for me the way you once did—nothing could hold me back from getting you.

MARY. Oh, William—William, you mustn't say that. [*Taking the rose from her hair, smelling it and holding it to her lips*] Take this and keep it and look at it sometimes when it's faded and think of me. Perhaps I'll be faded, too. Isn't it pretty?

WILLIAM. Not half so pretty as you are.

MARY. Oh!

WILLIAM. Your cheek is much softer and pinker.

MARY. How can you say such a thing! It couldn't be. See. Look! [*Holding the rose to her cheek and bending near him. He kisses her cheek*] Oh—how could you! How could you, William! Oh—you're hurting my arm! You're going to make it black and blue. There, look at that red spot. Kiss it and make it well. Oh no—I mustn't say that. [*William kisses her forearm, her elbow, her shoulder and her throat.*] Oh, William—you mustn't!

WILLIAM. I won't let anybody else have you. Are you engaged to Hiram?

MARY. Oh, what does it matter?

WILLIAM. I never have loved any other girl. I never will.

MARY. And do you think I've ever loved any other

man? Oh, I ought not to have said that. But I will say it, just this once before we part forever. I loved you as no girl ever loved a man.

WILLIAM. God! [*Bending over her hands and holding them to his lips.*]

MARY. We must be brave, William, and say good-bye.

WILLIAM [*Kneeling before her, his head bowed in her hands.*] I can't—I can't—don't ask it.

MARY. It's too late. You're pledged to another. You must be true to her and live a beautiful life, William.

WILLIAM. I ain't going to do it. You're my fate. I'll blow my brains out if you don't marry me. I'll kill anybody else that gets you.

MARY [*sobbing*] But fate is parting us.

WILLIAM. Look here. I'll have the horses ready in an hour. You go home and put on your riding habit and meet me at the cross-roads in an hour.

MARY. No, no, William. I couldn't—I couldn't.

WILLIAM [*still on his knees*] You've got to. We can't let life treat us like this. We've got to take hold of things. Nothing can stop us. This is meant to be.

MARY. Then it would be wrong to let anything separate us. It's stronger than we are, William. Eternal and beautiful like the stars. But, oh, I can't do it, William. Never—never in this world can I do it. I'm not sure that it would be right. I'll be behind the oak tree. It's bigger than the maple.

WILLIAM [*getting up*] You angel!

MARY. Don't you bring Fleetfoot. I'm afraid of

her. Bring Silver Star. Will you love me forever?

WILLIAM. Forever and ever.

MARY. In this world and the next?

WILLIAM. Longer than eternity.

MARY. There never has been a love as great as this. I feel it. I know it. Oh, William, I love you so! I love you!

[They are locked in each other's arms; their lips pressed together as the light fades.]

MARY THE SECOND

TIME: 1897.

The light comes on again and shows the same sofa with a tall, fair, rather æsthetic looking boy standing by it.

He wears evening clothes of the period and is examining closely a dance program, checking off numbers with a small pencil.

An orchestra is playing Sousa's "Washington Post" twostep with great swing and pomp.

A dark boy, more sturdy in appearance, also wearing evening clothes, comes into the scene quickly.

ROBERT [*as he comes on with smiling self-assurance*] Hello, Richard. Who's the dude dancing with Mary?

RICHARD [*with injured dignity*] I thought she was dancing with you.

ROBERT. No, I have this next one with her.

RICHARD. Oh no. I have it.

ROBERT. You're off your trolley. It's mine.

RICHARD. You're mistaken. She has it with me.

ROBERT. You better go find her, then. I think I'll wait here [*throwing himself on the sofa*].

RICHARD. You seem to be very sure of yourself.

ROBERT. You bet I'm sure.

RICHARD. You're not going to stay here and make a scene, are you—over a little thing like this?

ROBERT. I haven't anything to make a scene about. I'm just waiting to dance with Mary. If that's painful to you, why not *withdraw* so you won't suffer so much?

[*The orchestra changes to "Daisy Belle" and Robert sings a verse with a gaiety intended to madden Richard.*]

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true,
I'm half crazy all for the love of you.
It won't be a stylish marriage—
I can't afford a carriage,
But you'll look neat—upon the seat—
Of a bicycle built for two.

RICHARD. Oh, don't! It's bad enough to have to dance to anything so vulgar—without hearing the words.

ROBERT. I'm stuck on the words.

RICHARD. You probably are. They're just about suited to your vocabulary.

ROBERT. What's the matter with my vocabulary?

RICHARD. Nothing. I dare say it expresses everything you think—very adequately.

ROBERT. Meaning my intellect is not so colossal as yours.

RICHARD. I couldn't be so rude as that.

ROBERT. Suppose you clear out then before I say something so rude you won't care to hear it.

RICHARD. You're making a fool of yourself.

ROBERT [*Rising quickly*] I'll show you who's the fool!

MARY [*Coming into the scene out of breath*] Oh, I'm

nearly dead! Mamma *made* me dance with that old man.

[*Mary is the perfect Gibson type—in dress and hair and figure.*]

ROBERT. He's got cheek asking you. He must think he's a young masher. Come on, this one is ours.

RICHARD. It's *mine*, Mary.

MARY. Oh—which one *is* it?

ROBERT AND RICHARD. The tenth—a twostep.

MARY. No, this is an extra. Isn't it?

ROBERT. No, it isn't. Let me see your card.

RICHARD. Let *me* see it.

MARY [*Hiding her program*] No!

ROBERT [*Showing her his*] Look at this. There it is—the tenth—perfectly plain.

RICHARD [*Showing his card*] Nothing could be plainer than this.

MARY. That's funny. Well—the *next* one is an extra. One of you can have *that*.

ROBERT. It's mine, anyway.

MARY. I'll tell you what let's do. Let's divide *this* one. I'll dance the first half with you, Robert, and the other half with you, Richard.

ROBERT. I don't see why I should give up half my dance.

RICHARD. Oh, give it all to him. You're wasting time talking about it.

MARY. Now boys, don't be silly. I'll stay here and sit it out. The first half is Richard's. Go on Robert. I want to talk to Richard.

ROBERT. Rats! I make myself pretty tired doing this.

MARY. It's a sweet thing for you to do. Ta-ta.
[*She turns her back to Richard and blows a small kiss to Robert.*]

ROBERT. I'll be back in a jiffy. [*He goes out.*]

MARY [*Sitting on the sofa*] Now we can talk.

RICHARD. How *could* you?

MARY. How could I what?

RICHARD. I don't care anything about the old program. [*Going to her and tearing the program in two*] I want to know what you said you'd tell me tonight.

MARY. I'm not going to tell you *anything* when you're in that kind of a humour.

RICHARD. What kind of a humour did you expect me to be in?

MARY. The kind you were last night—when you're different and not like anybody else.

RICHARD. You were different—too—you made me believe you *would* marry me and tonight you've hardly looked at me.

MARY. But I'm thinking every minute.

RICHARD. What are you thinking?

MARY. Life is wonderful. I want to live it wonderfully.

RICHARD. We'll live it wonderfully—together. Our souls are like one soul.

MARY. Yes, but our dispositions aren't. Sometimes we feel alike. When you read poetry to me we're awfully high and exalted, but when we're just going along in an every-day way we aren't a bit alike.

RICHARD. Well, it's better to be alike and feel alike on the heights than in commonplace things that don't matter.

MARY. But I believe they do matter. I wonder which matters the most.

RICHARD. Which are the more important in the world—the great things or the little things?

MARY. Oh, of course, of course—but the trouble is when you do ordinary little things that I don't like, I forget the great ones and I could just—

RICHARD. Just what?

MARY. Just kill you.

RICHARD. But that's your fault, dearest—not mine.

MARY. I wonder. I wonder if it *is* my fault when I hate you and yours when I love you. I do love you sometimes—Richard.

RICHARD. Oh, Mary, we belong to each other. We were *meant* for each other—in our *real* selves.

MARY. But I'm not sure which *is* my real self. You see, Richard, it's this way. Now listen and see if I can make you understand. Sometimes you're the most wonderful thing in the world. You say things that no one else says—and you think and feel and understand—and then sometimes—

RICHARD. It's you who don't understand. Listen dearest—

ROBERT [*Dashing in*] Time's up. Slide, Kelly, slide! You must have said everything you ever thought of by this time.

RICHARD. Oh time doesn't matter. [*Rising slowly*] A minute—or eternity are all alike.

ROBERT. You don't say! I'll take mine done up in sixty minute parcels, thank you—and you've had more than your share. Skip.

RICHARD [*Looking at Mary as he goes*] Eternity.

ROBERT [*After Richard has gone*] Dick's got 'em again. What in the name of Heaven, do you scrape up to talk to him about?

MARY. Oh, lots of things.

ROBERT. Does he spout poetry to you *all* the time?

MARY. It wouldn't hurt you to have a little poetry, too.

ROBERT [*Laughing and sitting beside Mary*] All right. I'll get some. Anything you say. What more do you want me to have?

MARY. You don't think much about—

ROBERT. About what?

MARY. Oh, about things that aren't just *things*.

ROBERT. What?

MARY. You see, you don't even know what I'm talking about.

ROBERT. How can I tell what you're thinking when you don't *say* anything.

MARY. That's just it. You ought to be able to.

ROBERT. Well, all right. I'll find out how it's done if that's what you want.

MARY. Oh!

ROBERT. What's the matter, little girl? I'll give you anything on earth and the moon and stars thrown in. Honest, Mary, no man ever loved a girl the way I love you. And I'll never change. *That's* the point.

MARY. What if you did? It would be horrible.

ROBERT. But I wouldn't. I couldn't. How could

I? You're meant for me. You're mine. We suit each other. Don't you trust me, Mary?

MARY. Oh yes, I trust you—but getting married is forever and ever and ever.

ROBERT. Of course.

MARY. And Oh—unless two people *do* love each other— Oh, in the most wonderful way—that *nothing* can change—

ROBERT. Like us.

MARY. Now listen, Robert. I want to make you understand.

ROBERT [*Taking her in his arms*] You don't need to. I do understand. I know all about it. [*He covers her face with kisses.*] I'll make you the happiest girl in the world. I love you. And we'll never change. Never.

MARY [*Clinging to him*] Oh, if it could be that way, Robert!

ROBERT. Of course it will be that way. Nobody ever loved anybody the way I love you. You're going to marry me, aren't you? You know you are! *Say it!*

MARY. Yes.

ROBERT. Do you love me?

MARY. Oh I do, Robert—and we must make it the most wonderful love that was ever in the world.

[*He folds her in his arms as the light fades.*]

ACT I

MARY THE THIRD

ACT I

TIME: 1922. *Summer.*

PLACE: *The living room in the Robert Hollister house.*

It is the conventional room of conventional success—filled with a certain amount of beauty and comfort produced by money rather than individual taste.

The walls are made by the same draperies used in the first two scenes—with the frames of the doors and windows set in.

The furniture is a mixture of old and new—brought into harmony in dull tones. The sofa that is seen in the first scenes is now upholstered in chintz.

Late afternoon in summer.

AT CURTAIN, *Mary the First at 75, and Mary the Second now 45 are in the room.*

Granny—Mary the First—sits on the sofa, still somewhat the pretty and spoiled darling—still a trace of coquetry in her soft blue frock. She is knitting a blue woolen scarf on large needles. 'Mother, Mary the Second, grown into a handsome full-blown rose—wears a gown and hat in good style and unobtrusive prettiness. She comes in by the long window—a little warm, a little bored and tired.

MOTHER. Hello, Mother.

GRANNY. Back?

MOTHER. Oh—It's hot! [*Sitting listlessly in a comfortable chair*]

GRANNY [*After an elaborate search for her ball of wool*] Who was there?

MOTHER. Oh, everybody.

GRANNY. Did you have a good time?

MOTHER. Not very.

GRANNY. You're a funny woman, Mary. I don't see why you ever go to a party. You're so indifferent about it.

MOTHER. What else is there to do?

GRANNY. When I was your age I never missed a party. Euchre was a much better game than bridge too. Much more sociable. You could talk all you wanted to, and I usually took the prize.

MOTHER. I'll bet you did, Mother.

GRANNY. Did you play for money?

MOTHER. Yes.

GRANNY. How much did you win?

MOTHER. I lost.

GRANNY. Serves you right. Ladies and gentlemen didn't act like professional gamblers when I was your age. Mary, let me tell you something. From something I heard Mary drop the other day I wouldn't be at all surprised if *she* plays for money too—sometimes.

MOTHER. I shouldn't be surprised if she does.

GRANNY. Do you know she does?

MOTHER. How can she help it, Mother? Everybody else does.

GRANNY. You could put your foot down hard and forbid it.

[*Mother smiles again and reaches for the after-*

noon paper on the low table near her—and opens it indifferently.]

GRANNY. I know Robert doesn't know. Aren't you going to tell him?

MOTHER. I don't think so.

GRANNY. You ought to. At least he'd try to put a stop to it. Robert certainly does *try* to make his children what they ought to be. He certainly tries harder than you do, Mary. Don't you think he'd try if you told him?

[Mary, reading, doesn't hear.]

Mary!

MOTHER. Un? What? I beg your pardon, Mother.

GRANNY. I say don't you think Robert would try?

MOTHER. Try what?

GRANNY. Try to put a stop to Mary's playing cards for money, if he knew.

MOTHER. I expect he would. He's tried to put a stop to almost everything else she does.

GRANNY. You don't help him much. You're certainly not bringing your children up the way I brought *you* up.

MOTHER. And do you think you did a good job on me?

GRANNY. At least I did a better one than you're doing on *her*. Look here! *[Drawing a box of cigarettes out from under one pillow and a box of matches from another]* Look here! It isn't enough to have them laid out on every table in the house. They're stuck under everything you touch. I expect to find them in my own bed some night. Why she hasn't set

the house afire long ago I don't see for the life of me.

MOTHER. I don't either.

GRANNY. And look at *this*!

MOTHER. What?

GRANNY. A hole burned right through this sofa by one of those abominable things.

MOTHER. Oh, that's a shame.

GRANNY. I should think it is. It's my *sofa*, too, you know. It came out of Aunt Fannie's house. I sat on it in her house the night I told your father I'd marry him.

MOTHER. Well—that was a great moment for us all, wasn't it?

GRANNY. Yes, it was. You needn't be sarcastic. And here's Mary abusing it. Sitting on it morning, noon and night with boys—boys—*boys*. Do you know how many boys she *has* sat on it with?

MOTHER. No, I don't. I served my time at sitting on it, myself.

GRANNY. That's what I say. All sorts of things have happened on this sofa and here she is treating it like—with no respect at all.

MOTHER. Were you taking care of the sofa when you were sitting on it?

GRANNY. Of course I was. And so were you. I didn't *allow* you to abuse it. You were *taught* to take care of things.

MOTHER. I don't seem to remember that.

GRANNY. Seems to me you're forgetting a great many things you ought to remember. Seems to me you're getting very hard and worldly as you grow older.

MOTHER. Nonsense, Mother! There's nothing hard about *me*. I wish there were.

GRANNY. You wish there were! There you are! That's a hard thing to say. You're getting more like everybody else—callous—just *callous*. You let things slip and you're not holding up strict enough standards to your children.

MOTHER. Yes, I know. Let's not start that, *please*.

GRANNY. There you go! You don't care a fig about what I say. There was a time when people thought what I said was of some importance, and listened to it—too.

MOTHER. Oh Mother dear, I *do* listen.

GRANNY. You have no more respect for my opinion than that. [*Flicking her fingers*]

BOBBY [*Dashing in from the outside*] Mother are you through with the car?

MOTHER. Y-e-s—but what do you—

BOBBY. I left my racket out at the club. I want to dash out and get it. [*He starts out and turns back.*] Oh Granny, another button's busted off this coat. Will you sew it on please? [*Putting it on the table.*]

GRANNY. Yes, dearie. Don't put it there. Give it to me. You can't put anything down in this house if you ever expect to get it back.

BOBBY [*Going to give her the button*] See—it came off here and it sort of took a chunk of the coat with it.

GRANNY. You bad thing! I s'pose I can darn it. Here, you keep it. I mended sixteen pairs of socks for you this morning.

BOBBY. Thanks.

MOTHER. Mind you're back in time for dinner Bobby. Your father will probably want the car to-night.

BOBBY. I'll hurry.

MOTHER. And don't drive too fast Bobby.

GRANNY. I'll never go with you again if you drive the way you did yesterday.

BOBBY. Oh you think anything over five miles an hour is too fast. [*He hurries out.*]

GRANNY. Bobby's a sweet child but he's getting to be a ripsnorter too,—just about as bad as Mary. Both of them are as wild as colts.

MOTHER. Well—after all they're my children and if I don't mind the things they do I don't know why you should.

GRANNY. Your children! Anybody would think I hadn't brought up a family of children of my own.

MOTHER. I expect you were a much better mother than I am, dear.

GRANNY. I *know* I was. You're shutting your eyes to things that are right under your nose. Robert does try. I will say that for him. Robert's peculiar in some ways, but I must say he does try to bring up his children right.

MOTHER. [*Seeing a letter on the desk and opening it to read*] Robert is always right.

GRANNY. I don't say that. But he certainly is as right as most men are. As men go, he's a very fine man. You're a very fortunate woman.

MARY. As women go, I suppose I am.

GRANNY. I sometimes think you don't appreciate him, Mary. I sometimes do.

MOTHER. I've spent my life appreciating Robert.

GRANNY. I don't know why you wouldn't . . . a man who has succeeded as he has and put you in this beautiful house.

MOTHER [*Sitting at the desk to write a note*] He certainly did *put* me in it.

GRANNY. Un? What do you mean by that? You're getting so sort of nifty and highy-tighty lately I don't know what you mean half the time.

MOTHER. Well, I don't mean much of anything. I wouldn't worry about that.

GRANNY. You're not living up to the principles I brought you up with.

MOTHER. Mother—if you'd only acknowledge that what you brought me up with hasn't any more to do with the case now than I have with the North Pole—and stop stewing about it—you'd be a much happier person.

GRANNY. Why Mary McDougal Hollister! That I should live to hear you say that! What's happened to you? You're different lately. What is it? Is anything wrong?

MOTHER. Everything's just exactly as it always was.

GRANNY. I should hope so. You're a happy woman. If you're not, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. When I was your age, it was the fashion to be happy. Women loved their husbands and appreciated their blessings. Or if they didn't they didn't air it from the house-tops.

MOTHER. No—they just lied along and covered things up.

GRANNY. Well land knows *you* haven't anything to cover up. That's one sure thing. [*A pause.*] Have you?

MOTHER. [*Sealing her letter and getting up*] Of course not.

GRANNY. Then what's the use acting as if you had? The thing for you to think about is your children and how to keep them from being contaminated by the terrible things that are going on. You aren't half strict enough with Mary. I tell you she's in danger—actual downright danger, and you don't seem to see it at all.

MOTHER. We're *all* in danger. You're in danger of becoming a fussy old woman. I'm in danger of being swamped by the hateful ugliness of—respectable—every day life. If Mary's got anything more dangerous than that to face, she'll wriggle through somehow, I s'pose. [*Taking her hat and going to the hall door.*]

GRANNY. And make a muddle of it. *She* doesn't know what's good for her. It's your business to make her see who's the right one for her to marry, and make her marry him.

MOTHER. Did your mother make you marry Father?

GRANNY. She didn't have to. I *knew* he was the best and I took him. Didn't I help you to take Robert?

MOTHER. No, you didn't, and I didn't take him—I

was taken. Mary won't be taken—and she won't take. She wants something different.

GRANNY. Wants? Wants? What does she want?

MOTHER. Something that *comes*. Something you nor I ever had.

GRANNY. I think you're out of your head lately! I'm going to take Mary in hand myself.

MOTHER. No you won't, Mother. I must ask you, please—to let Mary alone.

MARY [*Coming in quickly through one of the long windows*] Mother—I've got a great scheme.

[*Mary is twenty—slender and straight as a boy. She wears a slip of a frock—which leaves her free—and she vibrates with vitality and eagerness—rather dynamically interested in her own affairs. She pitches her hat into a chair as she comes in.*]

MOTHER. Have you, dear? What?

MARY. Some of us are going camping—Lettie and Max and Lynn and Hall and I—and do all our own cooking and cleaning up and everything—and see how really awfully well and decently we *can* do it. We think—we know, in fact—it's the best way in the world—the only way to really know each other—you know—to see each other all the time—in a sort of messy way—doing things we don't like to do—and sort of getting right down at realities you know—vital stuff.

MOTHER. I see. But why do you want to know each other so well? Why take such risks?

GRANNY. I think as much! It's hard enough to like anybody when they're all dressed up and on their

good behavior, let alone when they're all dirty and eating bad food.

MARY. That's just it, Granny. That's the point exactly. It's a magnificent test.

MOTHER. But why not let well enough alone?

MARY. Because you see—some of us—all of us, in fact—are in love with some of the others—and we're going to take this way of finding out—just what kind of love it is, and what we're going to do with it. See?

GRANNY. You take my advice and pick out the best one and stay at home with him, and wear your good clothes every day.

MARY [*Going to Granny to chuck her under the chin*] I bet you were the worst kind of a vamp, Granny.

GRANNY. I was a very modest maidenly girl, through and through and *through*.

MOTHER. Who's going with you? Who are the chaperones, I mean.

MARY. That's the point. We're not going to have any.

MOTHER. Oh—

GRANNY. What?

MARY. It would be the same old thing if we did and put the whole scheme on the blink.

MOTHER. But you don't mean—

MARY. Nobody would be natural. It would be the cut and dried conventional stuff and that's just what we don't want. We want to see each other as we really *are*.

GRANNY. You mean go way off alone—boys and girls *together*—without any older people?

MARY. Yes.

GRANNY. Are you stark staring crazy?

MARY. Not at all. I think it's a great idea. People don't *know* each other before they're married. That's why most marriages are merely disappointing experiments instead of lifetime mating. That's why the experimenting ought to be done *before* marriage.

MOTHER. We'll talk about it after while, dear.

MARY. Oh Mother—why wait to *talk*?

GRANNY. Yes, *why*? Tell her now that it's an unheard of, immoral, *disgraceful* idea to have even come into a nice girl's head. Tell her that—this minute.

MOTHER. Wait, Mother.

MARY. Immoral? Disgraceful? Why, pray? Why?

GRANNY. Because it outrages all the decencies. What would you do at night, I'd like to know?

MARY. We'd go to bed and sleep—as decently as we do at home in our own beds.

MOTHER. Now, now, dear.

MARY. If you can't think of anything but *that* Granny, you *have* got an evil mind.

MOTHER. Mary!

MARY. We aren't going away just so we can sleep together. We could stay right at home and do that, let me tell you.

MOTHER. Mary!

GRANNY [*Rising in shocked excitement*] Are you going to *do* something? Don't you know *now* you must do something, or are you just going to go on sitting still?

MOTHER. Mother, will you *please* let me—

MARY. If I could just talk to Mother alone once, Granny, without you interfering, I might be able to make her understand something.

MOTHER. Mary—be quiet! Aren't you ashamed to speak to your Grandmother like that?

GRANNY. No, she's not. There's no shame in her. She's brazen and disrespectful and you *let* her be.

MARY. She isn't *letting* me be *anything*. I'm myself, Granny. Can't you understand that? And I'm talking about something very important to me which you don't understand at all.

MOTHER. Mary—that will *do*, I say. Tell your grandmother you're sorry, and don't let this happen again.

MARY [*Going to Granny reluctantly*] I'm sorry, Granny. I really am. I didn't mean to be disrespectful. Will you forgive me?

GRANNY [*Bursting into tears*] No, I won't. You're an impertinent little minx, and I don't want you to speak to me.

MOTHER. Oh Mother dear, don't take it that way.

MARY. I said I was sorry.

GRANNY. Don't touch me! Nobody loves me. Nobody appreciates me.

MARY. Please forgive me.

GRANNY. Let me alone. You've broken my heart. [*She goes out into the hall sobbing.*]

MOTHER. Now see what you've done.

MARY [*Closing the door*] Grandmother's the limit. She really is.

MOTHER. She's dear and sweet, and you have no business to say wild things you know will shock her.

MARY. What's wild about what I said?

MOTHER. You know as well as I do. Decent people don't *do* those things.

MARY [*Throwing herself on the sofa*] Because they don't is no reason it wouldn't be a darned good idea if they did.

MOTHER. Oh—*dearest!*

MARY. If nobody ever did anything that had never been done before we'd be a sweet set of dubs. People are dull enough as it is, goodness knows—without setting that up as the law to live by.

MOTHER. You're talking from very lofty heights. Unfortunately we have to live in the valleys of common sense.

MARY. That's the way you always get out of everything, Mother. I want to *try* things. What else is life for?

MOTHER. You can't try things the whole world knows have nothing but danger and disaster in them.

MARY. Do you mean to say I couldn't go any place with anybody and not stay *myself*—just as I am now—unless I *wanted* to be something else? And then if I wanted to why of course I *would*, and that would be my own affair anyway.

MOTHER. Mary! Stop it. If I thought for a minute, you *meant* that stuff, I'd be terribly frightened. But you don't.

MARY. Certainly I mean it. And I've just about decided that free love is the only solution to the whole business anyway.

MOTHER. What on earth are you talking about?

MARY. I don't know that I *could* live all my life

with one man—however much I loved him. Of course you and Father are satisfied with each other because you've never had anything else. But you don't know *what* you might have been, Mother, if you'd lived with a lot of men. Experience—constructive experience is the only developing progressive thing in the world.

MOTHER. There's nothing new about the relations between men and women and there's nothing true or right but the same old things that have always been true. I'm afraid you've been reading too much new stuff—trying to be clever and advanced. Don't, dear—don't.

MARY. Gosh, Mother—you don't suppose anything I've read in a book cuts any ice? I'm talking about *me* myself, and how I feel and what I want. Hal and Lynn both have qualities that attract me enormously—and I want to find out if I want to marry either one of them. I wouldn't be satisfied to be happy just in the way you and Father are happy. I want something that is beautiful, and beautiful all the time.

MOTHER. Nothing is beautiful *all* the time. If you're going on a quest for that you might as well stay at home.

MARY. Mother, are you and Father really happy?

MOTHER [*Startled*]. Of course! Why on earth do you say that?

MARY. Lots and lots of times I— Nothing.—

MOTHER. What do you mean?

MARY. There isn't anything really wrong, is there? You do love each other, don't you?

MOTHER [*Evading Mary's eyes*] Don't be silly. Of course we do. Now see here, Mary—you can't expect me to take your scheme seriously. . . .

MARY. But I do. What if I must do it, Mother? What if I must to *express* myself—to find myself? After all, it's my life, you know.

MOTHER. Mary, if you'll promise me to stop thinking about this nonsense I won't tell your Father, but if you don't—I will—and he'll—I don't know *what* he will do.

MARY. I do. I know every snort and gesture but that won't make any difference if I think my happiness—

[*Lynn comes through the lower window followed by Hal. Lynn is the prototype of Robert Hollister—Hal of Richard, seen in the prologue.*]

LYNN. Hello, Mary! Hello, Mrs. Hollister!

MARY. Hello, Lynn!

MOTHER. Hello.

HAL. Hello.

MARY. Come in—come in. Pray do.

HAL. What's the matter?

MARY. I've just told Mother the scheme.

LYNN. It doesn't seem to have made a hit.

MOTHER. It's too silly to talk about. You two boys ought to be men of the world enough to make Mary realize how impossible it is—instead of putting such ideas into her head.

MARY. They didn't, Mother. I put them into theirs.

MOTHER. Then get them out. I trust you, boys, you know, and when I come back into this room I ex-

pect you both to give me your word of honor that the whole thing is off.

[*She goes out—closing the door*]

MARY. Mother's difficult because she's so nice. Give me a light—somebody.

[*Going to sit on the sofa and taking a cigarette. Both boys strike matches and sit—one on either side of her, lighting their own cigarettes.*]

MARY. [*Going on after a long puff and throwing back her head to blow the smoke—crossing her legs and folding her arms*] It's almost impossible to talk to her or get anywhere with her, because she's a perfectly happy inexperienced woman, the most dangerous kind.

LYNN. Dangerous? I wouldn't exactly call your mother dangerous.

MARY. She's dangerous because she's contented, and therefore not progressive—stupid.

LYNN. Oh.

HAL. [*Slowly and importantly*] Of course—I get that.

MARY. And she represents such an awful lot of women. They haven't moved an inch for ages.

LYNN. Your mother's a peach, though.

MARY. Of course she is—a perfect darling. I'm crazy about her. That's why this thing is so hard.

LYNN. Then give it up. Hang it, I'm not so mad about it, you know.

MARY. I knew you'd be the first one to back out.

HAL. So did I.

LYNN. I'm not backing out.

HAL. Yes, you are. Give it up, old man. It's not your gait anyway. Just drop it.

LYNN. And let you stick? Not much. Don't worry about my gait. I'll keep up all right.

MARY. Is the first thing that Mother says going to knock it all out of you?

LYNN. No—but people are going to talk like blazes and I can't stand to have you talked about, Mary.

MARY. Oh Lord, Lynn! Do we have to begin all over to convince you?

HAL. You see, old man, you're not really with us. You're only going because you don't want to be left out. You don't see it as something important to the improvement of the whole question of love and marriage.

LYNN. Take it from me, Max and Lettie aren't up in the clouds the way you two are—you're fooling yourselves there—*hard*.

HAL. I don't agree with you. I think Mary and I have succeeded in making them see that—that—

LYNN. That what?

HAL. That if they haven't the courage to lead their own lives regardless of other people's moth-eaten convictions—they will never get anywhere or be any further along than their fathers and mothers.

MARY. Of course, to me it's thrilling—positively thrilling. I've never done anything in my life that I like so much. It's so simple—so absolutely simple—merely to go off and live naturally and freely for two weeks—doing a thing we know in the bottom of our souls is *right*, and knowing perfectly well the whole

town is going to explode with horror. Then we'll march back again with our heads well up and prove that we're finer and more intelligent people than we were before we went away. I think it's big—you know.

LYNN. Y-e-s—but what if it never was understood and accepted. It would be terribly hard on you two girls.

HAL. Even so—it would be worth it. They'd both be doing something great. Wreckage of the individual doesn't count in the world's work.

LYNN. Not so long as the *other* fellow happens to be the wreck.

MARY. Now listen. We've all reached the point where we think it's worth doing. I've even decided I *must* do it—in spite of mother. But if we're going to get away with it, we've got to do it quickly before the others back out and spill the whole business. I think we'd better go tonight—after the party. We'll all be out late—anyway—and nobody watching the time and expecting us. I'll get word to Letitia, and we can pack now and put the stuff in—in your garage, Lynn, and all start off together.

HAL. Great!

LYNN. No—we've got to be foxy getting out of the garage—not get together till we're out of town—then when we're out on the road, let 'er go.

MARY. I can hardly wait! And now—you boys have to promise me—utterly and absolutely—that you won't make love to me the whole time we're gone. It's going to be a square deal for everybody, and don't forget this—I may not want to marry either one of you—

and you may not want to marry me after all. You *do* understand—don't you?

HAL. I do. Certainly. You're magnificent, Mary. If we haven't enough of your spirit in us to rise to this we're rotters. If you *do* find that Lynn's the one to make you happy I shall understand and if I can't take you by the hand, old man, and wish you luck—I shall be horribly disappointed in myself.

LYNN. And if the same thing happens to *me*, I hope I'll have the guts to clear out and not stop to wish anything on anybody.

MARY [*Getting up and standing between them*] You're splendid—both of you. Shake. [*The boys clasp hands and she puts hers over theirs.*] Skip now before Mother comes back—and avoid the issue. Bye-bye—see you tonight.

[*The boys go. Mary goes to the hall door—about to open it. Hal comes back.*]

HAL. [*In a whisper*] Mary!

MARY. Oh!—I thought you'd gone.

HAL. Just a minute.

MARY. What do you want?

[*They go to the sofa and sit. Mary turns on the light in the lamp which is behind the sofa—the rest of the room is in shadow—with the same effect as in the scenes in the prologue.*]

HAL. I just want to say this, dear—that whatever happens—I'll be with you and you can count on me and my love—and above all on my *friendship*.

MARY. I know I can, old dear. I know that and it gives me such a wonderful feeling of security—your understanding, I mean.

HAL. That's what I wanted to be sure of. That you *do* feel that.

MARY. Oh I do—I do.

HAL. Of course I know your soul belongs to *me*, Mary—whatever happens. We may get lost from each other, and confused and entangled—but *that* will remain through eternity—that our souls have found each other and understood.

MARY. Yes, I know dear. I know.

HAL. And I'm sure of *you*—*now* in reality. No love as great as mine could fail to find its completion. *You* will be sure too. I'm not afraid. I love you, Mary. I love you as no man ever loved before.

MARY. If I were sure of that!

HAL. You *will* be. Will you kiss me, Mary, as a consecration to our ideal?

MARY. Of course.

[*She kisses him with a very honest and unfeeling smack on the lips.*]

HAL. [*Rising with a sigh*] That will live through eternity.

[*He goes. Mary goes to the door again. Lynn comes to the other window.*]

LYNN. Mary!

MARY. Oh—I thought you'd gone.

LYNN. [*Coming in*] I waited. I knew Hal would come back to say something. Just a minute, Mary. Come here. [*They sit on the sofa*] I came back to say this—that if I wasn't *dead sure* I'm going to get you, I wouldn't go a *step* on this tom fool expedition.

MARY. Now—

LYNN. Listen! I'm going to take care of you and

pull this thing off *right*, and you're going to come back engaged to *me*.

MARY. Now if you're going with any fixed ideas you can't go at all. It's going to be growth and freedom.

LYNN. I don't need to grow. I *know* what I want. I love you.

MARY. But that isn't enough. You don't know that it will last forever.

LYNN. Of *course* it will. When people love the way I do, it's *got* to last. You *do* love me, don't you?

MARY. Yes—I do—in a way—very, very much. But not in *all* ways. It isn't the great love that embraces everything—that envelops and sweeps one away—so there's no doubt about anything.

LYNN. Tell me how much you do love me and I'll take a chance on the rest.

MARY. I think—I *think* I'd rather you were the father of my children than any man I ever saw.

LYNN. Well then what difference does anything else make?

MARY. But that isn't everything.

LYNN. What else *is* there?

MARY. Beautiful—mystic—far away things. Please go. I'm afraid Mother will come and spoil everything.

LYNN. [*Catching her hand*] Kiss me.

MARY. No!

LYNN. Why not?

MARY. I don't want to.

LYNN. Well if I've got to act like a dead man for two weeks—you might kiss me once—now.

MARY. No.

LYNN. [*Taking her by the arms*] You've got to!

MARY. If you do I'll hate you.

LYNN. Did you kiss Hal?

MARY. None of your business.

LYNN. But *did* you!

MARY. [*Pulling away from him*] Do you want Mother to catch you here? Don't! I'll run around the house and get upstairs.

[*She darts out the upper window and Lynn the lower. After a moment Mother opens the hall door and comes in—turning on the lights. She hesitates, is about to go back into the hall when Bobby comes in quickly through the lower window.*]

BOBBY. Mother—have you got seventeen dollars? I need it quick.

MOTHER. No. Why?

BOBBY. I ran into a fellow and smashed his fender. He'll settle for that and keep quiet and I can get 'em at the garage to fix our car tonight—if you'll keep Dad from wanting it.

MOTHER. Oh Bobby—*again*! This is awful.

BOBBY. It's hell. Have you got the seventeen?

MOTHER. I don't know. I don't think so.

BOBBY. Go see—please, Ma, and it'll be all right. The fellow's waitin' 'round the corner.

MOTHER. But I don't believe—

FATHER. [*Coming in through the window*] Bobby, a fellow out at the gate asked me if you'd just come in here. What does he want?

[*Robert Hollister is fifty—a solid successful man with a very agreeable manner when he is agreeable, and*

a man who, not so successful and sure, might have been a very delightful person.]

BOBBY. Oh—he—just—He's got a car out there he wants to show me.

FATHER. Indeed! That will be profitable to him.

BOBBY. Well—I guess I can *look* at it—can't I?

FATHER. [*Going to the desk, where he sits turning on the light and opening his paper*] I guess you can. Why don't you go out and look? You can't see it in here, can you?

BOBBY. I'm going.

[*He looks expressively at Mother and she starts to the door as Granny comes in.*]

GRANNY. [*Her pride and her feathers still somewhat ruffled*] Is that child in here? Because if she is, I won't come in a step.

FATHER. What's the matter with *you*, Granny?

GRANNY. [*Sitting on the sofa*] A good deal. I want to talk to you, Robert.

MOTHER. A—don't talk to him now, Mother.

GRANNY. Why not? Can't I even *talk* when I want to?

BOBBY. Mother! Ahem!

[*Mother looks at Bobby who nods frantically for her to go.*]

MOTHER. Robert's tired now. Wait till after dinner.

FATHER. Let's get it over with now—whatever it is. I'd like to rest after dinner. I want a long ride. Bobby, you get the car out and have it here so I won't lose any time. We'll all go for a long ride in the country.

BOBBY. Yes, Father.

MOTHER. Oh—that's too bad, Robert.

FATHER. What's too bad?

MOTHER. I promised the car to someone else this evening.

FATHER. You did? And what in the name of common sense did you do that for when you know it's the only recreation I have? The only way I can cool off and get a good night's sleep.

MOTHER. But it's for a poor sick woman who has *no* way of getting out.

FATHER. She *hasn't*? Well, I haven't either. I'd be a poor sick man if I didn't have *some* little outing. You don't seem to have thought of that. Is the poor sick woman going to drive my car herself?

MOTHER. No—Bobby's going to take her.

FATHER. Then take her for half an hour, Bobby, and be back here sharp—understand?

BOBBY. Yes, Father.

[*Mother starts to the door again. Granny snivels.*]

FATHER. Now, Granny, what is it? Out with it.

GRANNY. She—

MOTHER. Bobby, bring me a handkerchief out of my top bureau drawer—in the box in the right hand corner. You know, you can get it.

[*Bobby suddenly understanding starts to the hall door.*]

FATHER. How about that fellow waiting out there?

BOBBY. I'll see him as soon as I get Mother's handkerchief.

FATHER. [*To Granny*] Has Mary been doing something to upset you again?

GRANNY. She—

MOTHER. Oh, she didn't mean to, Mother. She didn't mean to hurt your feelings.

GRANNY. Oh, never mind my feelings. I'm used to that. I think Robert ought to know things and I think it's my duty to tell him. You're so slack yourself. Mary's very slack, Robert.

FATHER. What have you been slack about now, Mary?

MOTHER. Mother doesn't realize that girls can't be *just* the way they were when she was a girl.

GRANNY. Fiddlesticks! Right and wrong haven't changed a bit and no amount of angling and twisting and dodging can get away from facts.

FATHER. Well—well—what are the facts in this case? Come to the point.

GRANNY. Mary's got—

MOTHER. Please, don't talk about it *now*. I'll tell Father at the right time.

GRANNY. The right time! The right time is *now* this minute, before any harm's done. Putting things off is your worst—

FATHER. For heaven's sake, what *is* it? [*They both start to talk.*] Now don't both talk at once. Christopher! It's enough to be in court all day without hearing cases all night, too. What is it? Now you first, Mary. Wait, Mother.

GRANNY. Oh yes, I can wait. I'm used to that.

MOTHER. It's only a very foolish idea Mary has in her head, and I know I can get it out if I go at it in the right way—without making a row about it.

GRANNY. That's what you always say, Mary,—

and it don't very often succeed, so far as I can see. This time it's too serious to fool with. It's got to be nipped in the bud.

FATHER. There's a good deal in what your mother says, you know, Mary. You *are* pretty soft and undecided. That's your besetting sin.

MOTHER. If anybody's *hard* with her now it *will* be serious. It's got to be handled very carefully. She believes she's right with all her—

GRANNY. Shucks! She doesn't anything of the kind. It's a dangerous—

MOTHER. That's why we must avoid the danger and—

FATHER. Now see here Mary. Tell me what it is and I'll settle it without any squeamish nonsense. What danger is she in?

GRANNY. That's the way to talk, Robert. I knew you'd settle it. You tell him the truth Mary, or I will.

FATHER. [*Looking at Mother*] Well—

MOTHER. It's already settled.

FATHER. Un?

MOTHER. It's all right. She won't do it.

FATHER. Won't do what?

GRANNY. How do you know she won't?

MOTHER. Because I know. I trust her.

MARY. [*Coming in quickly from the hall*] Mother, will you hook me, please?

[*She wears a charming evening gown—very simple. Her lovely young body is free and somewhat exposed. An evening cape is thrown over her arm*]

MARY. Hello, Father.

FATHER. Hello, daughter.

MARY. I got all my bills straight, Dad—and I haven't overdrawn my allowance a penny for three months. Pretty good—un?

FATHER. Yes, I must say you do pretty well in that line. You've got a good mind if you'd just use it—instead of throwing it away.

MARY. What makes you think I'm throwing it away?

FATHER. I wouldn't have to *think* much to see that.

MARY. I think you have a perfectly corking mind, Father—but you don't always use it the way I think you ought to.

FATHER. And what's this I hear about some new idea you have in your head?

MOTHER. Robert—*please!*

[*Father shrugs his shoulders and goes back to his paper.*]

MARY. Mother, your hands are shaking. Can't you find the hooks?

GRANNY. I don't know why she couldn't. There's nothing to the whole dress *but* the hooks.

MARY. Are you still cross at me, Granny? I'm awfully sorry. I'll be good.

GRANNY. I don't know how you can expect to be good in that dress.

MARY. What's the matter with this dress? It's a love. Isn't it, Mother?

MOTHER. It's very pretty, dear.

GRANNY. Yes, you uphold her in her nakedness, instead of making her put on clothes enough.

MARY. Oh Granny!

GRANNY. I'll wager you haven't got a sign of a petticoat on.

MARY. Of course I haven't.

FATHER [*Looking over his paper*] What's the reason you haven't?

MARY. Heavens—nobody wears a petticoat, Father.

GRANNY. I do. Look at her. She might just as well be stark naked for all the good her clothes are doing her.

MARY. You needn't talk, Granny. I think it's much better to show my back than the way you used to show your front. Thanks, dearest. [*As her mother holds the cape.*]

[*A whistle is heard from outside.*]

That's Lynn. Good night, everybody. Good night, Granny. [*Kissing Granny's cheek*]

Good night, Dad. [*Kissing the top of his head*]

Good night, Mother dear. [*Putting her arms around her mother*]

FATHER. Where are you going?

MARY. To Lettie's for dinner and a dance at the club afterwards.

FATHER. What time will you be in?

MARY. Why—I don't know.

FATHER. I don't want it to be so late as it was last night, mind you. Understand?

MARY. Yes Father.

FATHER. And listen to me—if you've got any *new* kind of daredevil recklessness in your head, you get it out or you'll reckon with me. Understand?

MARY. Yes Father.

GRANNY. Aren't you going to put anything over your head?

MARY. Goodness no, Granny. It's roasting.

GRANNY. Mary, are you going to let her go out in the night air without putting anything on her head?

MARY. Oh—

FATHER. Put something over your head. Do you hear?

MARY. I haven't anything to *put*.

MOTHER [*Snatching up the scarf Granny was knitting*] Here, dear.

GRANNY. My fascinator! You'll ravel it all out.

MOTHER. I'll fasten it, Mother. It won't hurt it a bit. Good night, dear.

GRANNY. How do you know she won't take it off the minute she's out of sight?

MOTHER [*Holding Mary*] Because I trust her—always—anywhere.

MARY. Good night, Mother dear. You *are* a darling.

[*Mary starts out. She comes back impulsively throwing her arms about her mother.*]

MOTHER. What is it, dearest?

MARY. Nothing. Good night.

[*She kisses her mother and goes out quickly. Bobby has come back through the upper window during this scene and sits sprawling in a chair.*]

GRANNY. Where's your mother's handkerchief, Bobby?

BOBBY. Oh—I forgot. I went out to see the fella.

GRANNY. I'll wager it wasn't a handkerchief she sent you for at all. I expect it was something else—something you ought not to have.

FATHER. What's that?

[*Mother moves a chair up to the desk and sits with her back to Father as she reads.*]

GRANNY. I say I expect—

FATHER. I heard what you said. What have you been doing, Bobby?

BOBBY. Nothing.

FATHER. What about the fellow's car? What did you think of it?

BOBBY. Oh—I didn't think much of it.

FATHER [*Still looking over the paper*] I got the repair bills today on *my* car and by Jove if they aren't cut in two this next month, I'll sell the damn thing. I never saw anything like it.

BOBBY. Well, I don't make the bills, Father.

FATHER. Oh no. The car just walks out and gets itself out of commission. I'll sell it I tell you. I'm not made of money, you know. All the bills were terrific this month, Mary. Something's got to be done.

GRANNY. Well, I don't run up the bills. I'm a *very* little eater if you mean *me*, Robert.

FATHER. I don't mean anybody. But you might control things, Mary, and keep them within bounds.

MARY. Oh I do try to, Robert—I do.

GRANNY. You're not as careful a housekeeper as I was, Mary.

MOTHER. No—and eggs aren't ten cents a dozen now, either.

FATHER. We've got to cut down. That's all there is about it.

BOBBY. That's what you always say the first day of the month, Dad.

FATHER. The whole country's going to collapse if we don't look out—with this reckless extravagance. Everybody's living beyond their income—everybody. Same wild looseness there is in every other direction. There's a general lowering of standards and ideals that is undermining society and civilization.

GRANNY. That's just what I was saying to Mary this afternoon. She don't see it. She don't see it creeping into her own children.

FATHER. Creeping in—striding in, you mean.

GRANNY. Yes, that's it.

MOTHER. You can't expect your own children to be different from other people's, you know.

FATHER. I do expect it, by Jove. If I had my way they would be. If I had my way they'd all be at home this evening.

GRANNY. That's what I say. It certainly is a lovely, *lovely happy* home, and they ought all to be *in* it.

NORA [*A neat maid—opening the hall door*] Dinner is served.

MOTHER. There's dinner and you two aren't ready. Run along, Bobby and get ready for dinner—and *hurry*. Why *will* you two *always* wait till dinner is on the table before you move? Hurry, Bobby, *hurry*. [*Bobby rises and shambles out.*] Come Robert.

FATHER. It might wait a little for me.

MOTHER. You simply *cannot* have decent food and

keep it waiting. You've done it all your life and it's terribly irritating.

FATHER [*Rising reluctantly*] I have to rush all day. I would like peace and relaxation at home.

MOTHER. Here's your hat, Robert.

FATHER [*As he goes into the hall*] I don't want it.

GRANNY [*Trotting after him*] We're going to have chicken tonight, and I declare it is a shame we aren't all here to eat it. I do believe in a family all being 'round the table together when night comes.

[*Mother ends the procession—going out with Father's hat as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE I

SCENE: *The scene is dark, showing a motor, a roadster, facing the audience. The whir of the motor is heard. LYNN, MARY and HAL are in the car. LYNN is driving. MARY sits next him and HAL beside her.*

MARY. She's only going forty. Step on her, Lynn.

LYNN. Are Max and Lettie right behind us?

HAL. Yes, they're sticking.

MARY. Oh, isn't it wonderful! I never was so happy in my life!

LYNN. We're ten miles out now. Ought to do it in three hours.

MARY. Easy! Isn't it wonderful driving at night when nobody gets in the way!

HAL. Everything's wonderful when nobody gets in the way.

MARY. Now she's sixty! Gosh, isn't it great!

HAL. You can't keep this up, Lynn.

LYNN. What's the reason I can't? She's just beginning.

HAL. For God's sake, don't stop or turn. They're right behind us.

MARY. I hope you're not afraid, Hal.

HAL. Of course I'm not. But there is a limit, you know.

LYNN [*Bending over the wheel*] No there isn't! Gee, it feels good to let her out!

MARY. It's marvelous! I never was so alive before. Isn't it glorious to know nothing can stop us! We're free! I feel as if we were part of the wind and sky. I think we're going right on up, through the sky, into the stars.

HAL. Yes, we may do that sooner than you think. For Heaven's sake, let up a little, Lynn. You've lost your head.

LYNN. Not a bit! She's a good little wagon. This is easy for 'er.

MARY. Don't spoil it, Hal. This is the way everything always ought to be—going with all we've got and nobody saying "*don't*." Oh, aren't you glad we did it? Don't you know now we're right, Lynn?

LYNN. *This* part of it's all right.

HAL. Of course we're right. But let's go slow enough to enjoy it.

MARY. But, Hal, I thought this was what you wanted, moving swiftly, alone, leaving the world behind. The world's asleep and we're running away from it out into the unknown.

HAL. This isn't spiritual exaltation. This is just reckless foolhardiness. Not what *I* came for.

LYNN. Do you want us to let you out?

HAL. Don't be funny.

MARY. Buck up, Hal. You're *free*! For the first time in your life.

HAL. There goes my hat!

MARY. Never mind. What's a hat?

HAL. You're doing everything you can to queer the whole idea.

LYNN. I'm taking you *to* the idea as fast as I can. Do you want to go back and get your hat?

MARY. Shut up, boys! This is glorious! Doesn't everything we've left seem a thousand times worse and more ordinary and piffling than it ever did before? Oh, there's a rabbit! Don't hit him, Lynn. Oooo! [*Screaming and hiding her face against Hal*]

LYNN. Look out, boy! Whew! Never touched him.

HAL. Stop it, Lynn! I can't *stand* it!

LYNN. Nothing to be afraid of.

MARY. He can't help it. Shut your eyes, Hal, and put your head on my shoulder.

LYNN. Here, here, none of that. Where's your nerve, Hal?

MARY. He's got a great deal more nerve about some things than you have. Gee, if you were both mixed up together into one man you'd be pretty good. See the stars. We *are* going up—up—right into them. This is life! Go on, Lynn! *Step on her!* [*Lynn bends lower over the wheel with a set face. Hal is holding on, sick with fear. Mary sits between them, her head thrown back, ecstatically happy.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE II

TIME: 4 o'clock the next morning.

PLACE: *The living room again.*

AT CURTAIN: *The light of early morning comes through the windows. After a moment five figures are seen crossing the upper window outside. They come to the lower window. Hal opens it cautiously and comes in quickly, carrying Mary's suit case which he puts on the floor above the chair at left C. Lynn carries Mary in. Letitia and Max follow. Letitia is a pretty girl of the flapper type. She wears Max's top coat over her evening gown and his cap on her bobbed hair. Max is a rather flamboyant and good-looking youth. The three boys are in evening clothes.*

HAL. Put her over here, Lynn. [*Lynn puts the limp Mary in the arm chair at the left. The others come close, bending over her.*]

LETITIA [*Kneeling beside Mary*] How are you now, honey?

HAL. Don't try to talk, Mary. How do you feel?

LETITIA. Thank goodness we got her home! I never was so frightened in my life. I thought you were going to die, Peaches.

HAL. How is the pain now, dear? Just as bad?

LYNN. Mary, I'm going to call a doctor.

MARY. No!

LYNN. Then I'm going to call your mother.

MARY. No!

LETITIA. Yes, we will. We must, honey. It's perfectly awful to see you like this.

MARY. No!

LYNN. Then how *is* the pain?

MARY [*Suddenly sitting up*] There never was a pain.

THE OTHERS. What?

MARY. I didn't have a bit.

THE OTHERS. What?

LETITIA. She's out of her head. Don't you know me, lamb? It's Tish.

MARY. I wanted to get you home. I knew I must do something desperate, so I had appendicitis.

LETITIA. You wanted to get me *home*?

MARY. Yes.

LETITIA. After raising heaven and earth to get me to go? Oh, she *is* out of her head.

HAL. No, she isn't. She's arrived at something important. Speak to us freely, Mary. We must be honest or it's all futile.

MAX. She needs a drink.

LYNN. Shut up, Max. What do you mean, Mary?

MARY. Sit down just a minute and I'll tell you. Ssh!

LETITIA. Oh don't push me. [*There is a general commotion.*]

MARY. Do be quiet. Don't wake anybody up—for heaven's sake. I suddenly knew I'd been all wrong—that the only thing to do was to get you back.

LETITIA. Do you mean it was all a joke?

LYNN. Ssh!

LETITIA. Did you never intend to—

MARY. No, no—no! Listen! Sit down, all of you—please.

LETITIA. Nobody wants to sit down.

HAL [*Sitting on the floor near Mary*] Yes, we do. Yes, we do. Don't be so emotional, Letitia. You have no mental poise at all.

LETITIA. No, and I don't want any. I'm sick of trying to act like a highbrow. I'm not one. I'm a human being.

HAL. Well, you might control your human feelings long enough to see what Mary's mental attitude is now. This reaction is very important.

MAX [*Lying on the floor in front of the others*] What the devil's it all about, anyway?

LYNN. Well, listen—listen, and you may find out.

LETITIA. We listened enough while you were working us up to *do* it, Mary. I don't want to listen while you *unwork* us again.

MAX. Come on, sweetie. Sit down. Don't be peevish!

LETITIA. I think it's just too awful to come home in this perfectly flat way. [*Sitting with a flop*]

HAL. Wait, Lettie, till you find out how it is. This may be the beginning of something greater. I'm sure it is, Mary.

MAX. Stop chewing the rag Lettie.

LYNN. Oh for heaven's sake, be quiet. Go on, Mary.

LETITIA. Yes, do. We're all sitting at your feet as usual—waiting for you to tell us why you changed your mind.

MARY. I *didn't* change my mind. It was something much bigger than that.

MAX. Must have been *colossal* to make you turn turtle like this. [*They are all sitting on the floor in a circle about Mary. Each has lighted a cigarette.*]

MARY. The whole world and life and what it means suddenly flashed before me, and—

LETITIA. I thought that flashed before you long ago. I thought that was why we—

LYNN. Sh!

HAL. Wait, Lettie, wait.

MARY. I knew that we were wrong. That we were destroying something—hurting something.

LYNN. You bet we were! I'm darned thankful we're back. We're well out of a nasty mess, let me tell you.

MARY. Oh, *you* don't understand, Lynn. It isn't that at all. I mean that we were absolutely right in what we believed but we've got to be big enough not to hurt other people with it.

HAL. Oh, Mary that is so weak.

MARY. I never *wanted* to do anything so much in my life, but I just suddenly saw it the way Mother and Father would—and knew how it would seem to them.

MAX. You knew that in the first place, didn't you?

MARY. No—not actually—in the real way. None of us thought of it from their side.

HAL. Oh Mary, their side doesn't count. We know we're thinking way beyond the general level of thought and if we don't act on it we're not advancing. [*He hits Letitia's nose with a gesture.*]

LETITIA. Oh, Hal, my nose! [*There is general noise and confusion. Mary hushes them.*]

LYNN. I don't see any use advancing so far that everybody thinks you're a *lunatic*.

MARY. But because we *do* see further than other people—we must be a—magnanimous. They can't help it—you know—these deep prejudices, and after all—they *are* our parents.

HAL. Personally, I think parents are much over-rated—and given entirely too much importance in the general scheme. Though I believe if my father had lived he would have been a great man.

LYNN. I suppose *you're* very much like him.

HAL. They say so. [*The others laugh.*] We're the next generation and the *next generation must go on*. We know that marriage *as is*—is a failure—a gigantic human failure—and we also know that it's getting worse.

MAX. You don't have to do much profound thinking to know that. Look at our own crowd. Every damned one of 'em divorced or ought to be. What's the use of being married at all?

LETITIA. Yes—love—yes—but we've said all that long ago and often. The discussion in hand at the moment is—was it a mistake for Mary to bring us back or not?

MARY. The point is—we have no right to make our parents suffer.

LETITIA. Suffer! Mother does anything *she* pleases—regardless of me. She's been married twice now and it isn't at all impossible that she will be again. She won't hesitate to rip things up—in spite of the

fact that I've just got used to calling this one Father, and just got so—I sort of can stand him. I don't see what I owe to them—and anyway, I don't think they'd suffer a darned bit no matter what became of me.

HAL. My mother is entirely sympathetic with our idea—of course. She knows Father would have left her sometime without a moment's notice, if he had lived. He wouldn't have vulgarized it with a quarrel or a divorce. *He was way* in advance of his time.

MAX. My father and mother are so old school—it would do them good to get a shock. If I want to try out Lettie in a *new* way—it's none of their business.

LETITIA. Try *me* out? I'm trying *you* out. Don't forget that, my lamb.

MAX [*Kissing her hand*] Excuse me darling.

HAL. If we never did anything except what our parents want us to do the world wouldn't move much.

MARY. Yes, but we've got to begin all over again and *make* them understand, and *tell* them what we're going to do. It was the sneaking away I couldn't stand.

LETITIA [*Getting up*] You certainly have put me in a sweet hole. I wrote a note and stuck it on Mother's pin cushion. I'm going to feel clever when they find me in bed in the morning in the same old way.

MARY. Oh Lettie, I *am* so sorry.

LETITIA. Oh don't mind me. Come on, Max. I might as well marry you *first*. Why not? You've got more money than anybody I know. [*Going up toward the window dragging her coat after her*]

MARY. Oh Tish, don't give up like that. We aren't through yet—we're just beginning.

LETITIA. I'm afraid you'll have a hard time inflating me again, Mary. I feel as though I had started off on wings and come back in a wheelbarrow. Are you coming or staying, Max?

MAX. You bet I'm coming. [*He hurries to the window*] So long! This is all right you know. Good luck, fellers—I've got *my* girl. [*He goes after Letitia.*]

LYNN. Of course it's all right. It's turned out the best thing in the world. And you were a brick—a brick, Mary, to do it.

MARY. It isn't all right. I've made it worse than ever—and nobody really understands what I meant at all.

LYNN. *I* do.

HAL. Have I ever misunderstood you, Mary? But I do think you were weak, dear girl. I do think you let sentiment—pure sentiment run away with you—after you've been so strong and done such good—*individual* thinking.

LYNN. Oh, cool off and let's get down to solid rock.

HAL. Oh yes, solid rock! That's what we're all chained to. I don't expect you to feel this as I do, Lynn. You couldn't.

LYNN. *I hope* not.

HAL. I'm not going to pretend that I'm not disappointed in you, Mary. But this isn't the end. You *will* do it yet—and in a still wider, fuller way. Anybody who's got the idealism you have, can't go back to the sordid conventional old rut.

LYNN. Start the car, old man, I'll be right out.

HAL. Thanks. I'll walk home.

MARY. Hal—you're not angry with me?

HAL. No—not angry, but hurt and horribly—*horribly* disappointed. You were thinking with distinction—and now you've gone back to the ordinary level of the average girl. Of course I'm disappointed. [*He goes out.*]

LYNN. It's turned out the best thing in the world. I love you more than ever, Mary. And you love me—don't you, dear?

MARY. Don't ask me now—please. I'm just beginning to find out something.

LYNN. You needn't expect me to believe for a minute that you hauled us off on this wild goose chase and then hauled us back again, because you got afraid of public opinion, and hurting people—and that stuff.

MARY. You don't—

LYNN. You say you had a sudden flash—well, it must have flashed on you which *one of us* you wanted to marry, and God knows it couldn't have been Hal—I give you credit for that—so, in all modesty, it must have been me.

MARY. I can't talk about it now. I want to think. The thing that brought me back is more important than *that* just now.

LYNN. Just what *did* bring you back? Tell me.

MARY. I will try to make you understand—some-time.

LYNN. I'll stop on my way downtown in the morning.

MARY. Then hurry. I want to lock the window.

LYNN. Well tell me this. Even if you haven't

found out yet, you want *me*—aren't you *dead sure* you don't want Hal?

MARY. Please go.

LYNN. But I want *you* and I want you harder than ever. Talk about going up into the stars! I went up and I'm still there and I'm going to stay. When you sat there close to me—making me go faster—when your hair blew in my face—I didn't care whether we smashed into eternity or not. We were together—alone.

MARY. We weren't. Hal was there.

LYNN. Same thing. You weren't the only one who got a flash of what it all means. It was only you and me and space—that was *life*, all right—and I'm going to keep on living it—*up there*—in the stars.

MARY. But we can't. It's too high.

LYNN. Not with *you*.

MARY. We had to come down.

LYNN. Well, what of it! When I think what you went out to find—and that you even let me go with you to try to find it—I—my head swims. I can't say it, Mary—but I *know* what you want—because I've found it. I couldn't wish anything more wonderful for you than for you to love someone the way I love you.

MARY. Oh Lynn! I wanted to go on with you forever. I wanted to push Hal out of the way and go on and on—and never stop—with *you*.

LYNN. Mary!

MARY. I wanted to get inside your coat—close to you—away from everything else in the world.

LYNN. And that's right where you're going to stay.

MARY. And then I got afraid—of myself—of you—of everything.

LYNN. Dear!

MARY. And then I wanted to come home—and now I don't know what I want. We've lost that wild sweet something. It's gone and I'm afraid it will never come back.

LYNN. You wanted to come home because you knew that you loved me. All that wild stuff's over. We don't need it. I love you, and I'm coming over the first thing in the morning, to tell your father and mother.

MARY. Oh—I s'pose you might as well. There's nothing else to do.

LYNN. What's the matter dear? Aren't you happy?

MARY. I was—out there.

LYNN. And you will be here. We've got the star dust and we're going to hold on to it—tight.

MARY. Do you think we can?

LYNN. Certainly we can—nothing as great as this can get away from us.

MARY. We mustn't let it, Lynn—we mustn't let it. Go now—please. [*He holds her a moment—kisses her—and goes out quickly. Mary fastens the window—starts to the hall door and sees Bobby asleep on the couch.*] Bobby, what are you doing there? [*She goes to the couch and shakes him.*] Bobby! Wake up. I bet you're just pretending to be asleep. I'll bet you heard everything. Bobby—*get up!*

BOBBY. Un?

MARY. What are you doing down here this time of night?

BOBBY [*Half waking*] I came down to unlock the window for you—and I want to give you a tip.

MARY. What about?

BOBBY. They're on the war path. You've done it once too often. What the devil do you mean staying out so late? A girl can't get away with stuff like that—chasing 'round all night.

MARY. Oh a girl—a girl! What's the reason I can't come in when I please? [*Sitting on the couch beside Bobby.*]

BOBBY. Because you *can't*. Dad's foaming at the mouth. Gramma told him about your dope for goin' campin'.

MARY. She didn't!

BOBBY. She did.

MARY. If Grandma could only hold her tongue *once* in a while!

BOBBY. I wish she'd let me hold it for her once in a while. I'd pull it out.

MARY. What did Father say?

BOBBY. He's going to send you away.

MARY. What? Where?

BOBBY. Oh—just away. [*Waving his arm*] Anywhere out of this pernicious town with its pernicious influences.

MARY. Lordie, doesn't it make you tired?

BOBBY. You were a chump if you thought you could get away with that. You never would have had the nerve to do it anyway.

MARY. We *did* it. We were there—at the place where we were going to stay.

BOBBY. When?

MARY. Tonight. We went sixty miles an hour some of the time. It was marvelous.

BOBBY. You're a queer nut, Mary. What in "h" did you get yourself into that kind of a—

MARY. Because I'm *tired* of doing just what everybody else does because they think anything different is wrong. I came back for Mother and Father's sake—but if they're going to act up about it, I wish I'd *stayed*.

BOBBY. Well, gosh—you can't blame them much. Your rep won't be worth two cents if it gets out. Dad hit the ceiling so hard he hasn't come down yet. Honest, Mary, he *is* going to do something. Don't let 'em know you *did* go. He'll sizzle you. You'll have to dope up some reason why you stayed out all night.

MARY. I *won't*. Why should I? The way Mother and Father *make* you lie is sickening. Why can't they let me alone? I don't say anything to them about the things *they* do.

BOBBY. Wouldn't you *like* to, though?

MARY. *Wouldn't* I? Just to let go and tell 'em a few things.

BOBBY. I'd like to shoot a few at Dad—square in the eye—what I like about him and what I don't.

MARY. Exactly.

BOBBY. If I could just once let him know that I'm *on* to him I could listen to his favorite remarks about my character with more equanimity.

MARY. I know. *We're* always wrong. They *never* are.

BOBBY. And the worst of it is you can't tell 'em.

MARY. Tell? You might as well try to tell God He's wrong.

BOBBY. If Dad didn't take it as a matter of religion that I ought to give him the paper! If *once* in a while, he'd say "Here, Bob, you take it"—I'd be crazy about giving it to him.

MARY. Of course. And if I could only *talk* to Mother. I did try. I did try to make her see. She doesn't know at all what I want and what I think and feel. I know a great deal more about life and what's going on this minute than she does. They've never done anything thrilling or had any fun themselves and they don't expect anybody else to.

BOBBY [*With a chuckle*] Oh I don't know. They must have been pretty devilish—buggy-ridin' Sunday afternoons.

MARY. Yes—looking for wild flowers. Mother never had any beau but Father, I s'pose, and she just married him and settled down and there you are. Anything *I* do is wrong because *they* haven't done it. [*Giving Bobby a poke to make him move over and sitting closer to him*] Listen, Bobby. I came back for *them*. I wanted to do this thing more than I ever wanted anything in my life—but just as I was the happiest and the surest I heard Mother say—"I trust you—always—anywhere"—and she stayed right there with me—nearer than she's ever been before and I—well—I came back.

BOBBY. Darn good job you did too. I could have

told you before you started your idea was bunk.

MARY. Oh of course it all seems silly to you. You aren't old enough to know what it means.

BOBBY. Slush! I'm eighteen—you're only twenty.

MARY. Yes, but those two years make all the difference in the world.

BOBBY. Ho—o—Don't you fool yourself—I know a thing or two. Those fellows are big chumps if they were goin' off to let you size them up like that and take your choice.

MARY. Well—anyway—here I am—back—as Lettie says—in the same old flat way. You see—I began to think about Mother and Father somehow. They're narrow and old-fashioned, but they're *good*.

BOBBY. Yea—they're all right—even if they do scrap sometimes.

MARY. Sometimes I'm sort of worried about them.

BOBBY. I know. Sometimes it's rotten.

MARY. But home and the family and you and me are the most important things in the world to them. After all we're awfully lucky to have such parents. Lots of them are running around on the loose, you know.

BOBBY. You bet your sweet life they are!

MARY. And a really, truly home like ours *is* wonderful—and I just couldn't do anything to hurt it. They're good and they love us, and they *do* love each other. I guess I *will* just sneak upstairs and tell one more lie to keep them happy. Don't you ever really peep that I really *did* go. Don't—for their sakes, old man.

BOBBY. I'm with you. Go to it, Sis. [*She takes*

up her suitcase.] St! They're coming!—Beat it! [*Mary starts to the hall door.*] Look out! You can't do that.—You're caught. [*Mary drops the suitcase. Bobby turns out the light and rolls under the sofa. Mother comes in quickly from the hall—runs to the lower window and peers out. She wears a negligee—her hair disordered.*]

FATHER [*From the hall*] Are they there?

MOTHER. No.

FATHER [*Coming in—in bath robe and slippers*] I told you so. He's gone after her then. They're in cahoots. He knew all the time where she was.

MOTHER. I hope so.

FATHER. You do? You hope he lied to me steadily for hours?

MOTHER. Yes—if he knew where she is.

FATHER [*He paces about restlessly irritable with apprehension*] There you are. No wonder they lie.

MOTHER. They don't lie.

FATHER. They don't lie—don't they?

MOTHER. No, they don't.

FATHER. No they don't. They just go on deceiving you and getting away with it because you shut your eyes to it.

MOTHER. You wouldn't telephone any place again, would you?

FATHER. What good would that do? We've tried every place. Lettie's gone. Those good-for-nothing boys are gone. Of course that's what it means. She's bolted,—right under your nose.

MOTHER. I won't believe it. She *couldn't*. She wouldn't do it without telling me.

FATHER. Telling you? She *did* tell you.

MOTHER. She only said she was *thinking* about it. She was honest enough to tell me that—and I could have persuaded—

FATHER. Honest your foot! She's fooled you—deceived you. She does all the time.

MOTHER [*Coming away from the window*] Do you think Bobby *has* gone after her?

FATHER. He must have. He must have gone . . . to warn her that I know and that I'm going to punish her. I think he's gone to tell her that and bring her back.

MOTHER. Listen! I thought the 'phone was going to ring.

FATHER. I tell you I'm going to change things. I'm through. I won't be made a fool of by my own children. What's the matter with 'em? Where do they get it anyway? I sometimes think it's something in *you* they get their looseness from, Mary.

MOTHER. I expect it is.

FATHER [*His voice rising*] I don't believe you *try*. You're not firm enough. If you'd kept *at* it—day in and day out, since they were born—impressing the principles of—

MOTHER. Don't yell so! I'm not deaf. You'll raise the neighbors.

FATHER. I'll raise the roof. I'll raise heaven and earth. I won't *have* such children. What *do* you teach them—anyway?

MOTHER [*Going back to the window*] I don't teach them anything. What difference does it make? I want to *know where she is*.

FATHER. She's *gone*. That's what she is. She's disgraced us.

MOTHER. I don't believe it.

FATHER. No—you never face facts. That's what's put us where we are. She's *gone off just the way she told you she was going to*.

MOTHER. Try to get Lettie's house once more.

FATHER. No use getting that maid out of bed again. She's told us *fifteen times now* there's *nobody at home*. Of course that blatherskite of a Lettie—has chosen a time to go off when her mother and father *are* away—but yours did it right before your eyes.

MOTHER [*Going back to her chair again*]. Don't keep on saying that. *Do* something.

FATHER. Why didn't *you* do something at the right time? Why in the name of heaven haven't you controlled her?

MOTHER. Because *I don't know how*.

FATHER. Why don't you know how? It's your job. Why can't you run your house and your children as well as I run my office? Good Lord, she's only a young girl. You're more than twice her age. Why can't you manage her?

MOTHER. You're more than *thrice times* Bobby's age. Why don't you manage him?

FATHER. I do.

MOTHER. No, you don't.

FATHER. Besides, he's a boy. He's got to have experience. It wouldn't hurt him to go off on a spurt like this.

MOTHER. It would. It would. I couldn't bear it.

FATHER. You undermine everything I say to him

anyway—with your softness. *I* don't know what's the matter. It's not *my* fault. What in the name of heaven *is* the matter? Why have we *got* such rotten children?

[*He sinks into a chair—putting his head in his hands*]

MOTHER [*After a pause*] We don't know what kind of children we have.

FATHER. What?

MOTHER. We don't know them. We don't know how to take care of them. We don't come any place near it.

FATHER. Speak for yourself. Don't blame *me* because *you've failed*.

MOTHER. Of course *you* haven't—in *any* way.

FATHER. No—I don't think I have.

MOTHER. You're always *right* about *everything*.

FATHER. Well, what am I wrong about *now*? Haven't I told you from the beginning all the things you've let her do would—

MOTHER. Yes—yes—yes—you have!

FATHER. It's because you haven't done what I wanted that—

MOTHER. You're only thinking about what *you* want—and not about what's right for them at all.

FATHER. Well, is this right? This and everything that's led up to it?

MOTHER. No—but you wouldn't have made it any better by being hard and pig-headed.

FATHER [*Getting up*] Have you made it any better by being so weak and sloppy you let this happen?

MOTHER. She didn't mean any *harm*.

[*Beginning to cry with quiet heartbroken tears*]

FATHER. Oh no—no harm—just disgraced us. That's all.

MOTHER. Poor child! She was trying to find the unfindable thing—a perfect love. I went through it myself floundering around in the dark—trying to choose.

FATHER. I think you did pretty well for yourself—choosing.

MOTHER. Oh yes—it was wise choosing—

FATHER. You regret it—do you?

MOTHER. Don't you?

FATHER. If I do, I've got the decency not to say so.

MOTHER. If you could have seen what we'd be like in twenty-five years—would you have chosen *me*?

FATHER. If you feel that way about it—whose fault is it?

MOTHER. Or even *ten*. Did we have ten years that were worth *anything*?

FATHER. Are you blaming *me*?

MOTHER. At the end of *five* we were a failure—jogging along—letting out the worst side of ourselves for the other to live with.

FATHER. You're saying a lot of wild things. You haven't had one of these spells for years.

MOTHER. No—because I've just about given up *trying* to tell the truth to you about *anything*.

FATHER. That's so all right. You certainly are not any too keen about telling the *truth*.

MOTHER. Because you can't stand it. Your nature can't stand the truth.

FATHER. Oh don't excuse your lies and deceit and weakness by *my nature*.

MOTHER. Don't think I wouldn't be glad to be honest—to honestly be *myself*. You think I'm weak. Well, you couldn't *stand* my strength.

FATHER. What?

MOTHER. We *can't* speak the truth to each other. We haven't anything to speak it with.

FATHER. I'm flabbergasted at you. You seem to have lost what sense you did have. You disappoint me terribly.

MOTHER [*With a sudden outburst as her suffering gets beyond her control*] Of course I do. Don't you think you disappoint *me*?

FATHER. You haven't come along the way I thought you were going to. I can't *count* on you. You aren't *there*. Sometimes I think you aren't the woman I married at all.

MOTHER. And sometimes I think you're a man I *couldn't* have married. Sometimes I loathe everything you think and say and do. When you grind out that old stuff I could *shriek*. I can't breathe in the same room with you. The very sound of your voice drives me insane. When you tell me how right you are—I could strike you.

FATHER. Mary!

MOTHER. Oh!

[*She screams as she suddenly sees the suitcase*]

FATHER. My God—what's the matter?

MOTHER. Her suitcase! That wasn't here when I was in this room before. She *is* here. Mary—my darling—where are you?

[*She rushes out of the room. Father goes after her. After a pause Mary comes slowly from behind the curtain—stricken white and dumbfounded*]

MARY. Bobby! They hate each other.

BOBBY. Un.

MARY. How can they ever speak to each other again!

BOBBY. D'know.

MARY. I didn't know it was like this. And you can tell it's been going on—sort of smothered.

BOBBY. It sure has busted out now.

MARY. It makes me—all gone—inside.

BOBBY. Nothing to hang on to.

MARY. Father and Mother! I wish I hadn't come back.

BOBBY. I'd like to light out myself.

MARY. *Our* father and mother! I can't believe it!

BOBBY [*Going close to Mary*] We can't let 'em know we know.

MARY. How can we help it?

BOBBY. I guess plenty of parents fight.

MARY. But *ours*! I always thought they were so good! Oh Bobby!

[*She drops her head on his shoulder and is shaken with sobs*]

MOTHER [*Calling from the hall*] Mary—Mary—where are you? [*Rushing back into the room*] Oh my dearest—where were you? Where have you been? What have you been doing?

FATHER. [*Having come in after Mother*] Now young lady! This is the last time! Where have you been? What have you been doing?

MARY. Nothing wrong.

MOTHER. How *could* you? Do you know what time it is?

FATHER. It's morning. That's what time it is—and you've been out all night. This is the last time you're going to do a thing like this. And I know your *new* idea—what you were planning to do.

MOTHER. Robert—wait.

FATHER. I almost thought you'd done it tonight. If you're reckless enough to have wanted to do it at all—I almost thought maybe you'd started off tonight.

MARY. I did.

FATHER. What?

MOTHER. Oh no—Mary—you didn't. You didn't do that.

FATHER. You what?

MARY. I—went—tonight—all of us, to the place we were going to stay.

MOTHER. Mary—

MARY. And then we came back.

MOTHER. You don't mean you went to *stay*? You didn't expect to do that?

MARY. Yes I did.

FATHER. I'm not surprised. This is the *end*. You've gone too far. I'm going to send you away.

MOTHER. Oh Robert—no you're not. Wait!

FATHER. Why should I wait? I've waited too long. I'm going to send you where you'll live a decent normal life till you come to your senses. The thing you planned to do is a brazen outrage.

MOTHER. She didn't do it. She came home.

FATHER. Much *home* means to her! You've

abused it all—everything your Mother and I have taught you to respect and hold sacred—thrown it away. Why you came back at all I don't see.

MARY. I came back for a very silly reason.

FATHER. I'll bet you did—nothing with any good in it.

MARY. No—not a bit.

MOTHER. My dearest—don't say that. You came back because you love us.

MARY. [*Breaking a little but controlling herself quickly*] Yes—I did, Mother.

MOTHER. Because you were sorry and didn't want to hurt us.

FATHER. Hurt us! You've wounded us so we'll never get over it. You've destroyed everything your Mother and I have held up to you as right—all our standards—the sanctity of the home.

MARY. Oh *rot*, Father.

MOTHER. Mary! Stop it! You're out of your senses.

MARY. I came home for that and found it was a joke.

FATHER. What do you mean?

MARY. We heard you—Bobby and I. We were here in this room.

FATHER. Heard us what?

MARY. Heard you say things to each other that makes everything you're talking about now *disgusting*.

MOTHER. Oh, my child!

FATHER. You heard us discussing *you* and what you've done. You heard us say how pained we are.

MARY. We heard you *fight*.

MOTHER. Mary—don't—don't! You don't understand, dear child. Your Father and I were only excited. I honor and respect your father above everything on earth.

FATHER. Your Mother and I have had a lifetime of devotion—with the highest ideals of married life. We didn't think we'd live to see our own children desecrate all that we've lived for.

MARY. Oh don't! We heard. We know. You told each other the *truth*. What's the good of trying to plaster it over for us?

FATHER. There's nothing left. This is the result of the wild life you've been leading.

BOBBY. Why do you keep going on about *her*? It's you two that have smashed everything up.

FATHER. Stop! She's disgraced us.

BOBBY. She's not the one that's done the disgracin'.

MARY. I don't see how Bobby and I can ever hold up our heads again.

MOTHER. Don't child—don't.

MARY. What's the use of anything when everything we ever thought and believed about *you* isn't true?

BOBBY. We *know we're rotten*—plenty of times—but we always thought you were—

MARY. We always thought you were good.

FATHER. How *dare* you? Is nothing sacred to you?

MARY. A lot of things used to be. We always thought there was something between you and Mother, sort of holy—and different—that most people didn't

have at all. How do you s'pose we feel when we know that it isn't so? I don't see that it makes much difference what *we* do—anyway—when everything's all wrong with *you*.

[She goes swiftly out of the room as her sobs begin to come. Father turns away to the window. Mother sits helpless and dazed. Bobby lowers his head—ashamed to look at either one of them as

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

TIME: *Three hours later.*

The dining room.

The same curtains are used for the walls—with the same doors and windows placed in a different arrangement. The table is set for breakfast.

Father sits at the Right, holding the newspaper so that it completely hides him from Mother who sits opposite, trying to drink her coffee, and making a pretense of reading a few letters.

MOTHER. [*Forcing herself to speak*] We must make them know it was never—quite so bad before.

FATHER. Oh, I guess they've come to their senses by this time.

MOTHER. No matter *how* you feel towards me, make them think—

FATHER. I don't know that it makes much difference what they think.

MOTHER. It's the only thing that *does* make much difference.

FATHER. The point is, what are we going to do with her. And I've made up my mind.

MOTHER. To what? What are you going to do? [*A pause*] You wouldn't do anything without telling me. You—

[*Nora enters from the pantry with a small platter*

of scrambled eggs. She puts the platter on the serving table.]

FATHER. Thank you, Nora.

[Nora looks from one to the other—scenting something wrong—removes the fruit plates and serves the eggs. Mr. Hollister takes some, Mrs. Hollister refuses, Nora goes out.]

MOTHER. You wouldn't do anything without telling me?

FATHER. What good will it do to tell you?

MOTHER. But you can't—

FATHER. *You didn't tell me.* And it's because you didn't that this whole thing has come about. You've shown you haven't the strength and decision to compete with your children. There's nothing left but for me to take hold and—

MOTHER. Be careful.

[Granny enters from the hall cheerful and chipper. She wears an agreeable little lavender frock and a pink fluffy shoulder shawl]

GRANNY. Good morning.

MOTHER. Good morning, Mother.

GRANNY. I said good morning, Robert.

FATHER. *[From behind the paper]* Oh—good morning.

GRANNY. *[Opening her napkin with cheerful fussiness]* The paper must be even more entertaining than usual. Didn't I get any letters, Mary?

MOTHER. No—nothing.

GRANNY. Who are yours from?

MOTHER. Oh nobody in particular.

GRANNY. They must be from *somebody*. Pass me

the sugar, Robert, please. Isn't there anything you want me to read, Mary?

MOTHER. Oh—here's one from Cousin Maria.

GRANNY. Funny she didn't write it to me. She owes me one. Sugar—sugar, Robert. [*Poking Robert's arm, then opening the letter*] I don't see why Maria *will* use this paper. I've told her twice I don't like it. [*Robert passes the sugar to Granny*] Thank you, Robert. [*Patting his hand and smiling at him in her most irresistible way*] Feel a little grumpy this morning? Didn't sleep well, I expect. Mary, are you going to give me any coffee or not? Is your coffee all right, Robert? Nobody's paying any attention to you. I believe in petting a man a little in the morning till he gets the creaks out, and sort of warmed up. I'm always sorry for a man when he has to leave his comfortable home and start off for the day. Goodness! Maria's writing gets worse and worse. I can't read a word she says. Read it to me, Mary.

MOTHER. I will after breakfast, Mother.

GRANNY. You aren't eating a thing. At least you do come down to the table. I'm glad you're not like the lazy women who lie in bed and have their *own* breakfasts and let their husbands come down to the table. I think breakfast is the nicest meal of the day and the time people ought to be the cheeriest. Where are the children? You certainly do let them lag behind, Mary.

MOTHER. They were up late. I'm letting them sleep.

GRANNY. It wouldn't hurt them to come and see

their father. I know a man likes to see his family 'round him before he starts off for the day. Does Maria say anything about coming?

MOTHER. Um—sort of a hint.

GRANNY. Well, just don't you take it. I love Maria dearly, but I can't stand her in the same house. There's nothing she hasn't got her nose in— [*Nora enters*] just boss, boss, boss. Maria's got money. Let her stay at home and spend it. Don't you say so, Robert? Do put down that old paper, Robbie, and eat your breakfast. What's the news?

FATHER. Oh—nothing.

GRANNY. I never saw a man in my life who found any news in the paper after having his head stuck in it for a week. [*Nora serves the eggs to Granny.*] Oh! Scrambled eggs again! I wonder if she stirred cream in these? Did you tell Lizzie what I said, Nora?

NORA. Yes m'am.

GRANNY. What did she say?

NORA. Well—

GRANNY. Lizzie's a mule. It's the only way they're fit to eat. [*Nora goes out*] See how tough these are? [*She takes a bite of egg complacently and looks from Mother to Father.*] What is the matter? What's the matter, Mary?

MOTHER. Why nothing, Mother.

GRANNY. You two had a tiff? What if you have? This is another day. You have to begin all over again.

FATHER. It looks like rain.

GRANNY. Does it?

[*A pause*]

FATHER. We need rain. The country needs it badly.

GRANNY. Yes, I s'pose it does.

FATHER [*After another pause*] It's been the driest spell we've had for some time.

GRANNY. [*With a chuckle*] Robert's doing pretty well, Mary. You might say *something*.

MOTHER. I have a headache, Mother. I can't talk.
[*Nora enters, with more eggs and toast*]

GRANNY. If I'd stopped talking to your father every time I had a headache many a thing would have happened that didn't. I hope you two haven't quarreled over Mary. You have to stand *together* to control her. That's the only way you'll ever—

[*Mary comes in from the hall—solemnly followed by Bobby*]

MOTHER. Good morning, dear. Good morning, Bobby.

BOBBY AND MARY. Good morning.

GRANNY. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. [*They seat themselves*] Aren't you going to kiss me good morning?

MARY. Do you want me to?

GRANNY. No—I don't especially want you to—but I think you ought to.

MARY. I don't see why.

GRANNY. I'm not so anxious to be kissed, young lady—but I believe in keeping up appearances.

MARY. I don't.

GRANNY. Um—you'll get over that—the longer you live.

MOTHER. Eat your breakfast, dear.

[*As Nora serves the eggs again*]

MARY. No thank you, Nora.

MOTHER. Oh—

MARY. No—just some coffee, Mother.

FATHER. No thank you, Nora.

[*Bobby falls upon his breakfast eagerly. Mother pours two cups of coffee. Nora serves the coffee to Mary and Bobby, and goes out.*]

GRANNY. You're all awfully silly. I don't know why you can't go on eating, just because there was a little—*discussion* last night. You needn't be nifty at me, Missy, because I told your father. I did it for your own good.

MARY. Oh, that's a very small thing, Granny. Forget it.

GRANNY. Then what *is* the matter? Why can't you start off the day like a happy family ought to?

MARY. Because we're not a happy family.

MOTHER. Mary—

GRANNY. Then why don't somebody tell me what's the matter?

MARY. I should think you'd know.

FATHER. That will do. We won't discuss it now. But I've come to a decision.

MARY. About you and Mother?

FATHER. About you. I'm going to send you where you will learn the important things of life and learn to conform to the opinions of those who know.

MARY. Where am I to learn that?

FATHER. At a school I know of—a very fine one.

MARY. And are you and Mother going on in the same way?

FATHER. What do you mean?

MARY. I'm perfectly willing to go away to school or any old place if it will help. Bobby and I talked it all over. If you and Mother want a divorce, we'll see you through.

GRANNY. She's out of her senses.

FATHER. Don't put me and your Mother in the same class with the rotten set you've been running with. We don't tear up the ties of a life-time just because we've had—a—hard places—sometimes.

MARY. Do you mean you've patched it up? We won't *let* you.

FATHER. *Stop* I say.

MARY. Mother, do you prefer to stick together and hate each other?

MOTHER. You have a wrong impression. We were only wrought up over— [*Bobby starts to leave the table.*]

MARY. Bobby, for heaven's sake, speak up. Tell them what *you* think.

FATHER [*Shouting at Bobby*] Are you a part of this rubbish?

BOBBY. I know how you feel, Dad. I used to feel that way about it myself. But I changed my mind last night—after I saw how things are. We'll buck up and do anything—so long as it's got to be. Don't mind us.

FATHER. This is *insufferable*.

MARY. Go on, Bobby.

GRANNY. I can't stand it!

BOBBY. There's nothin' the matter with a divorce

—it's the havin' to have it that's rotten—and when you do—why you just *got-a*. So let's get at it and get done with it.

FATHER. You leave the room. Go upstairs.

[*To Mary*] Tonight I'll try to make you see straight. I can't say anything more now.

MOTHER. [*Shaking her head at Nora who starts in from the pantry*] No—Nora. Don't come in at all. [*Nora goes out.*]

MARY. I won't go away a step—to school or any place else—till you and Mother are settled.

FATHER. You'll do as I say.

MARY. And leave Mother wretched like this?

FATHER. Your mother is *not* wretched.

MARY. Yes, she is, and so are you, Father.

FATHER. I'm not.

MARY. Mother, do you want to go on living with Father or *not*? [*Mother bursts into tears.*]

FATHER. You've made her hysterical. She can't speak.

GRANNY. Well, *I* can! Hold up your head, Mary, and tell us you're a happy woman.

[*To Mary the Third*] You ought to thank your lucky stars your father and mother get along as well as they do. Life's not all skittles and beer, let me tell you—and you ought to be put to bed on bread and water till you get over this romantic notion of wanting to be *happy* every minute.

MOTHER. You don't understand, you children. Your father and I are sorry we quarreled last night, but you're making too much of it entirely. Stop it. It's over and ended.

MARY. You're crawling out of it, Mother. Now's your chance. We all *know*. You can't go back to the same old thing, because we *do* know.

FATHER. If reason won't control you something else will. You've made it impossible for us to let you stay at home. You've outraged everything that goes to make a home.

MARY. That's what *we* think *you've* done.

BOBBY. There isn't any home when you and Mother are like this.

FATHER. Do you set yourselves up against us?

MARY. Say something, Bobby.

BOBBY. What more is there to say? We've told you we don't want you to go on tryin' to keep up the bluff for *our* sakes. And you surely don't want to for yourselves. So what is there to it but to get together and quit? We're only tellin' you that we want you and Mother to be happy, and go to it. [*He goes out of the room.*]

FATHER. If it comes to defiance—you'll both go away.

MARY. Very well. We'll meet you half way. We'll go if you and Mother get a divorce.

FATHER. I'll settle you tonight. [*He goes out*]

MARY. Oh Mother, don't cry.

GRANNY. What do you expect her to do? It's the awfulest thing I ever heard of any child doing to any parent—*ever—anywhere*.

MARY. Oh Lord, I don't see anything to cry about. Let's get some action.

MOTHER. I think the best thing to do *is* for you to go away for a while, dear. Till we get over this.

MARY. Mother—do you actually mean you *want* to go on living with Father?

GRANNY. Listen to her! Who *else* would she live with?

MARY. Granny, will you keep out of this—*please*? I'm trying to help Mother.

MOTHER. Oh, don't you two quarrel. I can't stand *any* more.

GRANNY. We're not quarreling. Come here, honey—come here. [*Drawing a chair out from the table and sitting*]

Now listen, dearie. I know more in a minute about men than you and your mother put together. It won't be necessary for you or anybody else to go away—or upset our peace and comfort, if you'll just use your wits. A little tact and wheedling goes further with a man than all the storming in the world. You can get anything on earth out of your father if you'll just manage him. Let him *think* you're giving up to him, and you'll get your own way every time.

MARY. I think that's perfectly disgusting, Granny.

GRANNY. Now—now—don't be saucy. I'm trying to help you.

MARY. I don't need to be helped. It's Mother.

GRANNY. Well, the only way you can help her is to calm your father down. Rub him the right way till all this blows over.

MARY. Blows *over*? If you don't know how it is you ought to. They don't *love* each other. Bobby and I found it out last night, and we can't stand this twaddle and mush about home and the family when we

know Mother and Father ought not to even be in the same house. Is that the truth, Mother—or isn't it?

GRANNY. It's new-fangled nonsense. Modern selfishness. That's what it is. A man and woman have no right to expect to be happy *all* the time—every minute—day and night. You *have* to have a good fight now and then to clear the air. Your grandfather and I had plenty. You women now-a-days don't know how to manage men. That's what's the matter with you. Of course they get the best of you because you're trying to make 'em think you know as much as they do, and they won't *stand* it. You're such simpletons. You oughtn't to let 'em *ever* see how smart you are. Why I had my way about everything on earth. The madder your grandfather got the more I cried and the softer I was. I just twisted him round my finger—like that. And he thought I was right under his thumb.

MARY. Oh Granny—how can you! Mother isn't Father's mistress you know.

GRANNY [*Putting her hands over her face*] Oh! I never used that word in my life!

MARY. It's a perfectly good word. Mother and Father undertook the greatest relationship in the world and it hasn't been a success—so the only thing for them to do is to start another kind of life entirely. Isn't that so, Mother?

GRANNY. No, it's not! What would become of the rest of us?

MARY. *Us?* What have we got to do with it? It's their own inner closest life. It's not *right* for

them to live together. It's not decent. It's absolutely *immoral*.

GRANNY. I won't listen to such talk! It's Godless and heathenish! [*Going to Mother.*] Mary, you come upstairs and I'll help you. I can help you to bear anything you've got to bear with Christian fortitude as a good and noble wife should. I never dreamed you were silly enough to *let* yourself be unhappy. Heaven knows, you've got enough to be happy with—and if you're as clever as you ought to be you'll take the bit in your own teeth and he'll come trotting right along. There ain't a man on earth as smart as a woman if she just uses what God gave her—and there's no young chit can teach *me* any tricks! [*She goes out with her head well up, closing the door.*]

MARY. Now Mother—let's decide what to do.

MOTHER. Mary, you *must* stop this. You're making a tragedy out of just a little hard place that your father and I have to get over in our own way.

MARY. *Was* there someone else you ought to have married—or just the ideal man of your dreams?

MOTHER. Oh, we always like to think it might have been different with someone else—when we fail. I *have* failed—utterly.

MARY [*Kneeling quickly by her Mother and throwing her arms about her*] I adore you Mother. I didn't know till last night how much I loved you. I'm lots older than you are. Really I am. You're just a little girl and I'm going to take care of you.

MOTHER. I wish I were.

MARY. But still I *am* awfully sorry for Father. You do get on his nerves. He's bored. Father's bored

to death with you, Mother. You're disappointed and disillusioned in him—but I do think it's more your fault than his.

MOTHER. Oh—Mary— Why?

MARY. Women will have to change marriage—men never will. At least you've come a long way ahead of Granny. Her marriage was on a very *low plane*, of course. You haven't stood up to Father and looked into his eyes—levelly—without conditions and silly compromise because he's a man and you're a woman.

MOTHER. Go on.

MARY. The interesting side of you—as a *person*—you haven't given to Father at all. He said last night 'You don't come through. You aren't there.' He *is* there—in his way. There's *his* side too.

MOTHER. Oh-h—don't think I don't know that.

MARY. But you *are* going to stand up now and keep a stiff lip and come through with *this*.

MOTHER. I don't see anything but blankness before me. And there's Mother. She has to have a home.

MARY [*Looking deeply at her mother*] You mean you haven't any *money* without Father? That you and Granny are dependent on him? [*Mother nods.*] All that is so horrible . . . so disreputable!

MOTHER. *Mary!*

MARY. It *is*! It's *buying* things with *you*. Don't let it go on, Mother. We'll fix it some way. I'll help you.

MOTHER. I'm not young. I can't go out and make my own living.

MARY. But you *ought* to be able to. That's the point to the whole business. I shall *have* my own money. I'll *make it*. I shall live with a man because I love him and only as long as I love him. I shall be able to take care of myself *and* my children if necessary. Anything else gives the man a horrible advantage, of course. It makes the woman a kept woman.

MOTHER. Oh you—

MARY. Why it *does*, Mother. The biggest, fairest, most chivalrous man on earth can't feel the same towards a woman who lives with him only because she has to be taken care of—as he does to one who lives with him because she loves him. Unless it's love and only love—

FATHER [*Coming back into the room*] I want to speak to your mother. [*After a slight pause Mary goes out.*]

FATHER. The boy's hard hit. He's taken this thing terribly seriously. We've got to do something about it.

MOTHER. And the girl?

FATHER. Oh— She's excited—but *he* is actually suffering. As you say we've got to make them see they're mistaken. . . .

MOTHER. But *are* they?

FATHER. Then you meant everything you said to me last night?

MOTHER. And you meant everything you said to me.

FATHER. We were all stirred up.

MOTHER. Yes—enough to speak the truth.

FATHER. Well—what are you going to do? Let them go on—thinking what they think?

MOTHER. They've made their own solution.

FATHER. You mean . . . [*She nods.*]

You don't think for a second we . . . [*A pause.*]

We haven't done anything people get—divorces for, Mary. [*His voice growing a little hoarse.*]

MOTHER. We've done the worst of all things.

FATHER. What?

MOTHER. We haven't made it a success—and it *might* have been.

FATHER. Oh—we've been careless. We need more self-control I s'pose.

MOTHER. Self-control is a poor substitute for love.

FATHER. It's impossible to think of you and me—not together. It used to be all right. We've got to go back and begin all over again.

MOTHER. Go back to what?

FATHER. See here, Mary—some of the nonsense that child spouted has got hold of you. Don't let any of her silly . . .

MOTHER. She isn't silly. She's brutal because she's so young—but she's honest and—

FATHER. She's the product of this damnable modern loose-thinking.

MOTHER. And she's thinking nearer the truth than we ever did. She's got something dangerous and ridiculous in *one* hand and something big and real in the other.

FATHER. Oh, you can't take her seriously?

MOTHER. You say we must go back. Go back to

what? Our accidental love affair—when we didn't know each other at all? We *do* know each other now. How can we go on after this? *I can't.*

FATHER. What about me? I've got something to say about this—too—you know. I won't have my home broken up. Good God, Mary! Nothing means anything to me but you and the children! I won't have—

LYNN [*Coming in from the veranda quickly*] Good morning. Good morning, Mrs. Hollister. I'm glad you haven't gone yet, Mr. Hollister. I want to say to you both that I've come back to my senses good and hard. Mary's up in the clouds about the whole business but I've come down with a thud and know where my feet are. I know the good old way is the *only* way—like you two did it. *You* didn't need any experiments to make you know you loved each other for good and all, did you? You *knew* you'd stick to the end, and be crazy about each other forever—didn't you? And you've proved it. And that's what got Mary, you know. She sort of seemed to realize for the first time what marriage means, and she came back for your sakes. [*Mother and Father turn away*] Honest, I'm not stringin' you. I know you want to kick me, Mr. Hollister, but I've come to you in the good old way to say I'd like to marry your daughter and ask your *consent*. I *know* I can make her happy—and I *know* we were meant for each other, and I know we'll make a go of it the same way you have, and I hope you'll back me up and help me to get her.

[*He forces Mr. Hollister to give him his hand and shakes it vigorously and confidently*]

FATHER [To Mother—trying to get his hand away while Lynn shakes it] Bring Mary down here and let's get at this thing. [Mother goes out closing the door] Has she promised to marry you?

LYNN. Yes. Don't you think I'd make her a good husband, Mr. Hollister?

FATHER. How do I know what kind of a husband you'd make?

LYNN. But with your experience, don't you think if a girl marries a solid practical man who can take care of her—

FATHER. I don't think that has anything to do with the case.

LYNN. But if we're—

HAL. [Coming in from the veranda] Good morning, Mr. Hollister. Hello, Lynn.

LYNN. Hello.

HAL. I was going in to your office this morning, Mr. Hollister, to see you.

FATHER. *Indeed!*

HAL. I want you to know that I'm sorry we didn't go through with it last night.

FATHER. Ah!

HAL. Because it *looks* like a failure, doesn't change *me* in the least.

FATHER. That's important.

HAL. I *know* we were right.

LYNN. Oh, cool off, Hal. It's all over now and Mr. Hollister doesn't care anything about what *we* think.

HAL. Excuse me—it *isn't* all over. And what I think is more important than ever. I want you to know, Mr. Hollister, that I love your daughter too

much to marry her in the old blind accidental lottery that *your* marriage was.

FATHER. What?

HAL. It *was* a lottery, wasn't it? Just good luck that it turned out as it has? It might have gone the other way for anything you really know about each other, mightn't it? You've just had the luck of one in a thousand that you've loved each other devotedly and continuously all these years—haven't you? I'm sure you're a big enough man to acknowledge *that*.

LYNN. I think Mr. Hollister's bored stiff with us, if you ask me.

HAL. I suppose he is. But you've said your say, I'll bet, and I want him to know—

FATHER. I don't want to know *anything*.

HAL. But it's only fair to let me say that I'll stand up for my convictions before the whole town, if necessary. I know that unless we change the entire attitude of men and women towards each other—there won't be any marriage in the future. Unless we open our eyes to what happiness and decency really are—unless we lift ourselves to another plane of thought entirely—

FATHER. Oh, shut up about your plane of thought! You don't know any more what you're talking about than an unborn baby. Until you've *lived*—until you've gone through the mill—you don't know *yourself*, let alone anybody else. You don't know what kind of a fool you may be, or how you may ball things up.

HAL. That's just why we ought not to marry till we know—

FATHER. It's not the damned ideas that will get

you anywhere—it's yourself. If you're ever lucky enough to have a woman love you, you take care of that *one love*—and don't be so cocksure of yourselves. If you— [*Mary comes in from the hall*] Now see here, Mary, which one of these boys do you intend to marry?

MARY. Neither.

FATHER. You didn't start off on that outlandish idea last night without intending to marry *one* of them?

MARY. I hoped it would be one of them, of course. That's what I was going to find out.

FATHER. You couldn't have found that out by staying at home, I suppose, in a normal natural way?

MARY. I admit I found out a great deal more about it after I got home than I could have any other way.

HAL. How, Mary?

FATHER. Never mind that. You can't go as far as this with the most important thing in your life and drop it as if it was nothing at all. You can't go as far as this without having some indication as to which one of these boys you *prefer*. Now which one *is* it? What are you hesitating about?

MARY. I'm not hesitating at all. I know now if I'd gone off with each one of you *alone* for a year—we wouldn't have *known* each other. Now I know it takes most of one's life to do that.

HAL. Then we were right. I can't talk to you here, Mary, before other people—but you know I'd rather lose you than have you make a mistake.

MARY. [*Taking his hand quickly in both of hers*] Thank you, Hal. [*He goes out*]

LYNN. Mary, what's changed you since last night? What are you going to do?

MARY. Father, listen! This is what I've just told Mother. When I got home I told Lynn I loved him—and I do. I love him so much I can't live without him. I was going to marry him—quick. But now I wouldn't marry him for anything on earth.

FATHER. Why not?

LYNN. What do you mean?

MARY. Marriage is a disgusting sordid business affair that I wouldn't go into for anything.

LYNN. Mary!

MARY. But if you want me to, Lynn, I'll live with you till we're *sure* what we really mean to each other, and when we *know* we'll either be married or quit.

LYNN. Good heavens, Mary! You don't know what you're talking about.

FATHER. Is this the kind of muck and filth you've been thinking about?

LYNN. Why you never even dreamed of such a thing.

MARY. I didn't think I'd actually do it, 'till I found out how horrible a perfectly good and respectable marriage can be.

FATHER. Haven't you any decency about anything?

MARY. I'm sorry, Dad, but Lynn's got to know. He's got to know why I won't marry him. It's because of Father and Mother, Lynn. I don't believe in marriage.

BOBBY. [*Coming in quickly*] I've got Mother to say she'll do it. [*He stops, seeing Lynn*]

FATHER. Do what?

LYNN. Do you want me to go?

MARY. Don't go 'way. Wait on the porch.

[*Lynn goes out onto the terrace*]

FATHER. [*To Bobby*] Do what?

BOBBY. Leave you.

FATHER. You—

[*He tries to speak but stops helplessly*]

BOBBY. I've bucked her up to that and I'm going with her and take care of her, Father. You needn't worry about that part of it. But don't spoil it now—will you? Don't say anything to make her lose her nerve.

MARY. You won't will you, Father? That's splendid, Bobby.

FATHER. [*Broken and unbelievably*] Your mother didn't tell you—she'd leave me, did she?

BOBBY. Yes, she did.

[*Father goes slowly to the other end of the table and sits*]

MARY. You won't do anything to stop her—will you?

BOBBY. I'm thinking about you, Dad, just as much as I am about Mother. I know you want her to go. You just hate to come straight out and say so. Now's your chance—do it.

FATHER. Are you children blaming me for the whole thing?

BOBBY AND MARY. No!!!

MARY. Of course not, Father!

BOBBY. You bet we're not! I can see that it's hard livin' with a woman. Imagine one man living all his life with Gra'ma.

FATHER. [*Getting hold of himself again and rising*] You're acting like lunatics—both of you. If you've made your mother think I want her to leave me—

BOBBY. If *I* have? I like *that*! You mean if *you* have.

FATHER. You don't know *anything*—you young whippersnapper. Your mother's the finest woman in the world. I'd lay down my life for her. Your poor dear mother!

[*Bobby and Mary look at each other—surprised and slightly disgusted at Father's sudden sentiment.*]

MARY. For goodness sake, don't get sentimental *now* Father—just as Mother's getting some spine.

BOBBY. I think as much. I worked like the devil to get her to come to the point.

FATHER. [*Quite himself again*] Now see here. If you think for one minute anything you say is going to— [*Mother opens the door and comes slowly into the room*] Mary—you haven't let anything these children have said influence you?

BOBBY. If you don't do what you said you were going to Mother—I'm going to clear out. I won't live here.

MARY. And you know what I'm going to do, Mother. I've told Father too.

FATHER. Be quiet—both of you. Now Mary dear—tell them there's nothing in this nonsense. Tell them

they've kicked up a fuss over nothing and we're going right on with our customary happy life. Assert yourself—and tell them they're entirely mistaken. [*A pause*] Come—come—go on—dearest.

[*Father tries to be sure of himself, and assumes a slightly affectionate gaiety. Mary and Bobby look at each other, half disgusted, half ready to laugh*]

MOTHER. I'm going away.

FATHER. You're not. I won't have it.

BOBBY. Go on, Mother.

FATHER. Be quiet, I say. What in the name of common sense do you think life is anyway? Your mother and I haven't done anything to get a divorce for.

BOBBY. Of course you haven't beaten her or broken the eighth commandment—or any—

MARY. The *seventh*, Bobby.

BOBBY. Un? Well—but what you have done is a thousand times rottener, and if you're going to keep right on I'm leavin'. How about it Mother?

MOTHER. They're rebelling against the ugliness—and meanness—the cruelty and pettiness. They think it doesn't have to be. They're saying very foolish things—but they're true—they're true. I'm going.

BOBBY. And I'm goin' with you.

MOTHER. No. I'm going alone. It's the only way we can find the truth about ourselves, Robert, or anything else. Where's Lynn?

MARY. Out there.

MOTHER. Call him in.

MARY. [*Going to the window*] Lynn!

[*Lynn comes in*]

MOTHER. Mary, I don't ask you *not* to do what you say you're going to—for I know I haven't given you anything better—but I ask you to wait. It isn't our marriage that was wrong—it's what we've done with it.

LYNN. I'm not afraid, Mary—I'll make you happy.

MARY. How do you know you will?

BOBBY. That's what. I thought the thing you were up to was all hot air and bunk—but I begin to believe there's a good deal in it. I know one thing, by golly—I'll never take a chance. I'll never take a chance of being where you and Father are. If you two couldn't make a go of it, I'd like to know who *can*. I don't see why men and women don't stop *tryin'* to live together—anyway.

[*He starts to go*]

MOTHER. [*Stopping Bobby with her hand and going to the door*] Oh no—that isn't it. It's we—ourselves and what *we've* done—that are wrong.

[*She goes out. Bobby follows. Father goes to the door*]

MARY. [*Putting her hand on Father's arm*] Let her go, Dad. Let her go.

FATHER. But I'll bring her back.

MARY. Do you mean you love her?

FATHER. You've got an awful lot to learn, little girl.

MARY. [*Suddenly throwing her arms about his neck*] Make her love you, Dad. Make it all over. If you could! If you could!

[*Father—too moved to speak holds her close for a moment and goes out—closing the door.*]

LYNN [*Going down to Mary—after a pause*]

Gosh, I'm sorry. It's the last thing in the world I would have expected to happen.

MARY. Why didn't they know in the first place? Can anybody ever know?

[*Sitting in her father's place at the table*]

LYNN. We know. [*Sitting in Mother's place at the table*] We were *meant* for each other. No man ever loved a girl the way I love you.

MARY. I bet that's what Father said to Mother. I bet that's what *everybody* says. It makes me sort of sick.

LYNN. But we're different. We *know* what we've got.

MARY. How do we know we do? What if *the* very things you like in me now—you'd hate sometime. What if the things I think are strong and stunning in you now I'd think were pig-headed and kickable after awhile?

LYNN. How could we? People couldn't be better suited to each other than we are.

MARY. I suppose they thought that too. Twenty-five years Mother and Father have been looking at each other across the table. And most of that time they've wished they were looking at somebody else.

LYNN. Oh Mary, you don't—

MARY. If they hadn't been married, if they hadn't been *tied* to each other, or if Mother could have walked out and taken care of herself at any minute, they would have had to *please* each other in order to *hold* each other.

LYNN. I know. You're dead right. But what if they hadn't been married? You and Bobby wouldn't

have thanked them much for bringing you into the world without any name or anything to put your feet on.

MARY. I don't see that they've given us so darned much to put our feet on now. They've smashed everything I ever believed about love and marriage.

LYNN. Oh—your mother said it—there's nothing the matter with marriage—it's what people do with it. What's the use trying to bust up the best thing we've got? Why don't we begin to make marriage better instead of chucking it? Why don't we make it honest and decent and fair—and if we have made a mistake we'll *quit*.

MARY. Lynn—you're *marvelous*!

LYNN. You angel!

MARY. Oh *don't*! I bet Grandfather called Granny an angel—and knelt at her feet while he was saying it.

LYNN. Well old pal—we're going to be side by side—both on the same level—both on the square.

MARY. And just as free as though we weren't married at all.

LYNN. Absolutely.

MARY. No hold on each other but love.

LYNN. None.

MARY. And the minute that's gone—we're through.

LYNN. That's the stuff.

MARY. Give me your hand on that old man.
[*They clasp hands*] But Lynn, I wouldn't marry you if I didn't *know* that ours *is* the love that will last forever. There *can't* be any doubt about a love as great as ours, can there, dear?

LYNN. [*Drawing her onto his knees*] You *bet* there can't.

MARY. I *do* think we're safe, because we've been intelligent about it. I adore the way your hair grows at the side, dearest.

LYNN. Your eyes are the most beautiful things in the world. They have in them *everything* I want.

MARY. [*Putting her arms about his neck*] I love you.

LYNN. I love you.

MARY. And we must make it the most wonderful love that was ever in the world.

[*She kisses his lips*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

"OLD LADY 31"
A COMEDY IN PROLOGUE
AND
THREE ACTS

SUGGESTED BY LOUISE FORSSLUND'S NOVEL

THE CAST

AS FIRST PRESENTED

AT

THE 39TH ST. THEATRE

NEW YORK

ANGIE	EMMA DUNN
ABE	REGINALD BARLOW
NANCY	VIVIA OGDEN
MRS. HOMANS	MRS. FELIX MORRIS
SARAH JANE	MAUD SINCLAIR
ABIGAIL	ANNA BATES
BLOSSY	MAY GALYER
MARY	MARY CARROLL
JOHN	STUART SAGE
SAMUEL DARBY	LOUIS FIERCE
MIKE	JOHN B. MAHER
ELIZABETH	ELIZABETH LEROY
MINERVA	LOTTIE CHURCH
GRANNY	MARY DAVIS

PROLOGUE

TIME: 1860—an afternoon in late summer.

THE SCENE is a corner of Angie's garden showing the front of the small one story house with its front door and the small stoop. There is a low stone wall, at back, with several stone steps at center, leading up from the garden to the road. The steps are broken and sunken and over them is a rustic arch covered with bridal wreath—now in full blossom. Old-fashioned flowers, with hollyhocks predominating, border the wall and the house, and a round bed of pansies is at right center. A narrow gravel path leads from the door stoop to the stone steps. A crude rustic bench stands above the path. Grass covers the rest of the garden and extends off stage at right—with groups of trees and shrubs.

It is a peaceful well ordered little spot.

At curtain, the stage is empty. After a moment Abe comes slowly out of the front door, carrying a small and very old trunk on his shoulders. He goes up the steps onto the road and puts the trunk on the child's wagon which is there.

Abe is sixty-five—sturdy and stocky, having been once a fine figure of a sea-captain, but now bent and stiffened. He stands looking about at the house and garden, wiping his head with his bandanna handkerchief. His old blue reefer and cap and his white trousers still suggest his brave days on the sea.

Angie comes on to the stoop, an alert small woman of sixty with a face which has not lost its sweetness. Her quaint bonnet and black silk dress and mantle are still well preserved and exquisitely neat, and the curls which show themselves about her face are softening and charming. She puts her shabby old traveling bag on the step.

ANGIE. It's just three o'clock, Abe, we got plenty o' time. I told folks we wasn't goin' till tomorro' mornin', so's there wouldn't be nobody hangin' 'round to see us go.

ABE. Good idee.

ANGIE. You might just come and take just one last look 'fore we lock it up.

ABE. No—I don't want ter. I've looked my last. Shut it up.

ANGIE. [*Looking back through the open door*] The clock's still tickin' like it was goin' on fer us just the same. I hope it'll allers be wound reg'lar. But nobody'll ever be as good hand at that as you, Abe.

ABE. Maybe not. Lock it up, mother. Lock it up, and let's git through with it. [*Abe comes down to sit on the bench. Angie slowly closes the door and locks it. Her head goes forward on the door casing. After a moment she puts the key under the door mat. Abe goes on in a husky voice.*] I ain't bin a good husband ter you, Angie, or you wouldn't be lockin' yourself out o' your own hum forever.

ANGIE. [*Hurrying down to sit beside him*] Don't say that, Abe. 'Tain't so. [*They look away from each other a moment—each choking back the tears.*]

Look a here, Abe. 'Tain't too late to change our plans. We'll take our hundred dollars for a good tomb stone and I'll go to the poor farm *with* you—'stead of to the Old Ladies' Home, an' we'll both be together.

ABE. You won't do nothin' of the kind. I ain't goin' to have folks say I couldn't even put you in the Hum. 'Tain't as ef I was goin' fer away—we'll only be five mile apart.

ANGIE. I been thinkin', father, now we're goin' to part we seem ter be gettin' closer together than ever. We got a lot to be thankful fer.

ABE. I d'know as we hev. I brung you ter this, Angie. Ef I hadn't made so many bad investments and if I'd put what we had in *your* name—

ANGIE. I ain't goin' to hev you talkin' that way. It was yours, wasn't it—to do with as you saw fit? You might a giv' me all the riches in the world an' still we might a bin separated further'n we'll ever be now. I'd ruther be saying goodbye for the poor farm an' *loving* you, Abe, than sittin' with you in luxury an' not caring whether you was settin' with me or not. [*He turns away. She puts her hand on his.*] Ef I kin say that, after all these years, we got somethin' priceless—ain't we—that can never be took away from us—
auction sale or no auction sale.

ABE. We might a got two hundred—stid of one, ef you'd let me advertise the sale a little sooner, Angie.

ANGIE. [*Going up to her flowers by the wall*] You wouldn't a wanted folks comin' here buyin' our things just fer charity—would you? As 'tis, everything was bought by somebody as needed it, and got good value. My tea strainer thet went for the extry three cents

over the hundred was the biggest bargain of all. But the tea strainer won't be no good to me now and the three cents will. I kin keep that fer my own pocket money.

ABE. What good will three cents do in your pocket? Couldn't even burn a hole.

ANGIE. It'll buy a postage stamp, won't it—so's I kin write to you?

ABE. So 'twill—so 'twill. You be awful thrifty, Angie—more'n I be.

ANGIE. Men wasn't meant to be careful in little things like women. 'Tain't manly. Do you think—There wouldn't be nothin' wrong or dishonest 'bout my pickin' a few flowers to take with me, would there?

ABE. Certainly not. Ain't they yourn?

ANGIE. No, they ain't. They was sold yesterday.

ABE. Well, you just go ahead an' pick all you please an' ef any complaints is made, I'll hev my say to the sheriff.

ANGIE. [*Going about—picking flowers here and there*] I'll take 'em to Abigail at the Home. She loves flowers. [*Kneeling by the pansy bed*] 'Tain't as ef I was goin' among entire strangers. They's three gals there I used to go to school with—Abigail, Blossy and Nancy Smith. It's really goin' to friends—an' I'll just feel like I was visitin'—for a long while I reckon.

ABE. Them there gals is three old maids. The Hum is a natural 'nough endin' fer them thet ain't never had no *man* to take keer of 'em. It's different with you. It reflects on *me* to have you go.

ANGIE. [*Picking the pansies*] I guess of the two they'd rather hev hed *some* kind of a man—an be goin'

to the Home in the end—than never to hev hed no man at all.

ABE. You couldn't git a ole maid to own up to thet. They'll twit you—sure as sunrise—'bout your old man not bein' able to take keer o' you in yer last days.

ANGIE. If they do I'll hev plenty to say to them 'bout all the years he *did* take keer of me. [*Picking a sprig of forget-me-not*] Here, you must go away with a sprig of your forget-me-not in your button-hole. It would feel you was fergittin' your favorite ef you didn't. Ain't the pansies sweet today—liftin' up their little faces like they was speakin' to us? Law me—the things I've told to them! You never knowed it, Abe—but whenever you and me hed a sharp word or two, I allers come out to talk it over with them—an' somehow they allers took your part, an' sent me back ashamed o' myself. Little gentle creatures!

ABE. Women's funny things.

ANGIE. No, we ain't, Abe—an' that's what the pansies understand. They know that as soon as they could make me blame myself, I didn't have nothin' agin you, and thet was peace.

ABE. Thet reasonin's no good to me. It's cause I'm blamin' myself now thet I got such hell inside o' me. Ef I could find somebody else to put it on—*somebody to kick the very entrails out of*, it would be a heap sight more soothin' to me than settin' here acceptin' it.

ANGIE. Why, Abe dear, you ain't got the right idea about it at all. You're bitter-like and resentin' it—stid o' lookin' at it as one of the strange ways of Providence you don't understand.

ABE. I ain't got no use for a Providence thet knocks you flat—an' tells you *thet's* something you don't understand. It's just plain blasted hard luck we're up against. Some men makes money an' hes good luck an' some don't, an' I'm one o' the ones that *don't* an' there ain't no other way about it.

ANGIE. Why, Abe Rose! You ain't goin' to get sacriligious and profane. Where's your character? Has money got anything to do with *thet*? Just 'cause we've been a little unfortunate so far as dollars an' cents is concerned does that change *you*? You're the same man I married an' loved an' honored all these years an' I ruther be standin' here with you now, turned out, than anybody else on earth. What makes you act like an ordinary man an' talk about money? You're *my* man—an' you're jest the way I want you. Don't hevin' me mean anything ter you? [*Going to him she puts her hand on his shoulder. He leans his head on her arm.*]

ABE [*After a moment*] I ain't fit ter tie yer shoe strings, mother, I ain't.

[*Angie puts the sprig of forget-me-not in his button-hole.*]

ANGIE. Come, now, get the bag up the steps on to the road while I finish my bouquet and we'll start along so's we kin take our time an' not be hurried gittin' there. We can go easy and set down once in a while. I got some crackers in here. [*Touching her reticule*] And a surprise fer you—tobacco.

ABE [*Crossly as he gets Angie's bag*] It's all gone.

ANGIE. No, 'tain't. I bin scrimpin' you, 'long ever

day fer a week, holdin' back a pinch so's you could have a fine pipeful fer this long walk.

ABE. You beat all, mother. There ain't nobody like you.

ANGIE. [*Going to him and putting her head on his arm for a moment*] There ain't nobody like *you* nuther. [*She gets her shawl from the bench.*] So ef we be satisfied it don't matter a hill o' beans what other folks thinks.

ABE [*Going up onto the road*] Awful hot. Shouldn't wonder ef we'd have a shower 'fore night.

ANGIE. Think so? You always was a better weather prophet than me. [*She turns to look at the house and all of her flowers, saying goodbye to them in silent agony.*]

ABE. Come along, mother.

ANGIE. Yes—I'm comin'. The smoke's still comin' out of the kitchen chimbley. I'm glad. It makes it seem alive an' expectin' us back.

ABE [*Speaking harshly to hide his emotion*] Come along, mother—let's git through with it.

ANGIE. Yes, Abe, but let's do it gentle, so we won't have no regrets. We're goin' to remember this minute—the rest of our lives.

ABE. I reckon so.

ANGIE [*Going up to stand in the arch with him.*] You brought me here a bride—an' carried me over thet door sill. I used to think little feet would be patterin' over it and stumblin' through the flowers as the years came along—but it wasn't to be. All I kin say is—I wouldn't change an hour we've spent here—not one.

Would you? [*She slips her arm through his and leans against him limply as they stand under the arch of the bridal wreath.*]

ABE. Not one—mother—not one. [*She sobs—hiding her face on his shoulder. His arms close about her.*] Don't Angie. Don't.

ANGY. I ain't a goin' to. I ain't a goin' to do thet again. Besides, I got to keep my handky folded neat when I git there. Let me hev—a corner of yourn, Abe. [*Taking his handkerchief from his pocket to wipe her eyes*] My, you look awful nice today, father. [*Patting his arm as she gives back his handkerchief and brushes his sleeve.*] You remember the mornin' we planted this—the bridal wreath?

ABE. I reckon I do. [*She reaches up and breaks two sprays.*]

ANGIE. You press thet in your Bible when you go to bed tonight—an I'll do the same. My bridal wreath ain't never withered for me—and thet's what I want you to keep on thinkin'. Oh, Abe, I can give up all the rest—it's *you* I can't do without. Let me go with you. 'Tain't too late yit—let me.

ABE. No, mother—no! Am I the head o' the house or not?

ANGIE. Yes, you be, Abe—you be.

ABE. Then don't never say thet again. This is *all* I kin do fer you, Angie, fer God's sake let me *do* it. [*He strides off pulling the wagon after him*]

ANGIE. You're awful good to me, father—awful good. My! Won't they be proud to hev such a good lookin' man as you at the poor farm! I always loved the way that coat fitted—[*Trying to keep up her brav-*

ery she breaks—bending over the gate as she closes it.]

ABE [*From the road*] Come, mother—come.

ANGIE. Yes, I'm comin'—I'm comin'. [*She puts out a shaking hand in goodbye to her home and goes slowly out of sight.*]

CURTAIN

ACT I

SCENE: *The veranda of "The Home" fills the stage at back. There is a double door at center leading into the hall and steps at front going down to the grass.*

TIME: *Two hours later.*

AT CURTAIN: *Nancy is rocking vigorously in a low chair, crocheting a shawl. Mrs. Homans, sitting at the other end of the porch, is reading a dull looking book.*

NANCY [*Who is small and quick and sharp*] There's many a one comes to it thet never thinks they will. Angie thought she was doing a terrible fine thing for herself when she married young Captain Abe Rose and give herself awful airs at the weddin', when she hoped the rest of us would git a good man too. Much good it done her. This is what she's come to.

MRS. HOMANS [*A widow in respectable widow's weeds. A very small woman with very black hair and a most impressive dignity*] Pride doesn't protect us. We suffer through other people's iniquities. What could have been more unforeseen than that *I* should be an inmate of an old woman's home?

NANCY [*Still rocking*] That's what I say. If anybody hed ever told me that I—

MRS. HOMANS. My case is very different. The wife of a successful physician is particularly out of place here. I hope all his children suffer as I am suffering before they die. I was as good to them as their

own mother and this is what they've done to me.

NANCY. You can't never tell what step-children will do. That's why I was always agin marryin' a widower. I've hed many a chanct and refused 'em all—and I can't see but what I'm just as well off as the rest of you. Angie's comin' to it now.

MRS. HOMANS. This is a very good place for some people, but when a woman's had what *I've* had. . . .

NANCY. Blossy says you ain't any better'n the rest of us and it's time you settled down and made the best of it and stop actin' as if you was a outsider—which you *ain't*.

MRS. HOMANS. Blossy's little empty, addle-pated, feather-brained head will never comprehend what I've gone through, nor what I suffer in being here. She couldn't suffer as I do. She hasn't the intellect to do it.

NANCY. Yes, Blossy *is* cheerful an' empty, but I must say I like her. [*Sarah Jane enters from C. door carrying a wooden bowl in which are six apples and two steel knives.*]

Sarah Jane is tall and square and spare. She wears a calico wrapper and a small woolen shoulder shawl.]

SARAH JANE. The newcomer don't seem to be hurtin' herself to git here. Ef I'd been in her place I'd a got here bright an' early this mornin' an' sort o' took hold and felt acquainted by night—specially since it's Saturday. [*Sitting on the top step and leaning against a pillar, she starts to peel the apples*]

MRS. HOMANS. We aren't all as anxious to get to this place as you evidently were.

SARAH JANE. Some folks ought ter be so thankful to git here they'd go down on their knees to it and crawl up the front steps, stid o' settin' like a spinks afraid to move for fear folks won't know how grand they be. I've been a good worker in my time, thank God, and I ain't afeerd to own up to it for fear o' bein' looked down on. Work keeps folks sane an' sound and keeps 'em from gettin' all stove up both in mind an' body—ef they only knowed it.

NANCY [*With acid sweetness*] I was jist a sayin' what a good worker you was, Sarah Jane.

SARAH JANE. I bet you said thet an' a plenty more. I never knew you to stop with one remark, Nancy Smith. You an' Mis' Homans hev plenty o' time for conversation an' back bitin'. . . .

MRS. HOMANS. On the contrary, I've had no conversation since I came. You can only converse with your equals.

SARAH JANE. Why don't you talk to yourself, then?

[*Abigail comes onto the veranda fanning herself with her apron.*]

ABIGAIL. What's keepin' Angie, I wonder. Time she turned up, ain't it? [*Abigail is the matron of the home generously large in body and heart, a mother to all the other poor outcasts.*]

NANCY. I guess she's just dawdlin' along. Angie never was so terrible swift.

ABIGAIL. She's puttin' off sayin' goodbye to Abe, I guess. My heart aches for her. He's the salt o' the earth to Angie.

MRS. HOMANS. Poor salt to let her come to this.

ABIGAIL [*In a gentle drawling voice*] Well I d’know, Mis’ Homans. Some people think a roof over their head is somethin’ to be thankful for. Now, I know Angie’s thankful in her heart and she won’t come to us with no hard feelin’s, but it’s goin’ to be an awful pull to her to say goodbye to Abe—an awful pull—an’ he goin’ five miles away to the poor house. I declare I must manage to let her see him once in a while. Poor little Angie!

SARAH JANE. What you “poorin’” Angie fer? She’s got to stand it—same as the rest o’ us.

ABIGAIL. Of course, of course—but then she’s the last to come. I’m always sorry for the *last*. Besides their little roof has been sold right over their heads. Captain Rose has been a shiftless soul all his life—dabblin’ in this and that ever since he give up his boat—stid o’ saltin’ it away.

NANCY. An’ Angie treatin’ him as if he was God a’mighty.

ABIGAIL [*Laughing*] Why not? You women that never had a man can’t understand. You don’t marry a man to cure his faults—but just because he *is* a man, an different to you.

SARAH JANE. Ketch me! They ain’t worth worshipin’. [*Peeling her apples violently.*]

ABIGAIL. Of course they ain’t. Nobody worships a man because he’s worth it—but jist for the comfort and pleasure o’ doin’ it. You’re countin’ on a little extra sass for supper, are you, Sarah Jane, for Angie?

SARAH JANE [*Looking at Mrs. Homans and Nancy as meaningly as possible*] Yes, I be—and I brought out a extry knife for parin’—case anybody should feel in-

clined to soil their hands a little, stid o' bein' glued to books and crochet hooks.

MRS. HOMANS. I've never done menial work in my life. I don't see why I should begin now.

SARAH JANE. You don't pay a cent more than the rest of us, do you?

NANCY [*Never stopping her rocking*] I'm terrible busy gittin' this shawl done, for I need it over my shoulders evenings. I ain't goin' to git rheumatism for nobody.

SARAH JANE. You bet you ain't. You'll look out for your own shoulder blades. Ef it was anybody else's rheumatiz you wouldn't be so spry gittin' it done.

ABIGAIL [*Sitting on the top step and taking an apple to peel*] I'll pare a little, Sarah Jane—might as well while I'm settin' here coolin' off. I declare, I jist can't git Angie out o' my mind an' how cut up she's goin' to be leavin' Abe.

MRS. HOMANS. If he is as worthless as you say, she ought to realize she's better off without him.

ABIGAIL. Oh, she's used to him an' she's too old to take on new habits.

NANCY. Ketch me grievin' after any man thet couldn't take care of me.

SARAH JANE. Every time a married woman comes to jine us, I say to myself "I told you so! Where's the good o' men when it comes to a pinch?"

MRS. HOMANS [*With haughty curiosity*] A—sea captain you say he was, Abigail?

ABIGAIL. Yes, has been.

MRS. HOMANS. A very low grade of people they

must be. I wonder the board passed to let her come. [*Resenting this they all talk at Mrs. Homans for a moment.*]

NANCY [*Making herself heard above the rest*] She's as good as anybody—as good as anybody. Angie's as good a woman—as ever stepped over this door sill. All I hope is, Abigail, that you won't never let the Captain be hangin' round here comin' to see Angie. Ef there's any visitin' to be done betwixt them, let her go to the poor farm to see him.

MRS. HOMANS. Well, I should hope so. We couldn't have him coming here.

SARAH JANE. No sirree—no man comin' 'round this place. Thet's one thing we're kinda symbol of. Every woman here either had sense enough never to take a man or else has come to see the one she did take failed her when she needed him most.

MRS. HOMANS. I don't agree with you at all, Sarah Jane.

SARAH JANE. You don't? Well, what good are they—dead or alive? You didn't even git your life insurance outer yourn, did you?

ABIGAIL [*Laughing*] You're awful hard on the men, Sarah Jane. Now, my Jim lost every cent he had and used up mine, but if I had it to do all over again—I'd take him.

NANCY. Shucks! You're weak-minded, on the man question, Abigail, that's what you are—jist downright weak-minded.

SARAH JANE. Some women never does git over it. Look at Blossy, still makin' a fool of herself over Sam'l Darby.

MRS. HOMANS. She's a silly old woman—that's what she is—expecting that man to marry her.

NANCY [*Stopping her rocking for a moment*] Don't you think he ever will?

SARAH JANE. Never—never in this world.

NANCY. But she says he proposes to her regular once a year, when he comes.

MRS. HOMANS. Abigail, you ought to stop his coming here. Blossy's got no business having him come here once a year. It gives The Home a bad look.

ABIGAIL [*Chuckling*] Oh, I don't know. It looks like we've still got *hope*.

[*Blossy comes onto the porch from the hall. She is the spoiled darling of the group, a faded rose with much of the charm and coquetry of her youth still left. Her golden curls, powdered with gray, bob alluringly with the bird-like movement of her head and she flirts and flutters with unconscious coyness.*]

BLOSSY [*Fanning herself with her handkerchief*] Is it any cooler out here?

ABIGAIL. Come an' set down, Blossy.

SARAH JANE. Cool enough most anywheres ef you let your blood chill settin' still.

BLOSSY. Hasn't Angie come yet?

ABIGAIL. Not yet. I'm gettin' kinda worried about her. I wish now I'd planned to send Mike with the horse an' wagon for her.

BLOSSY. All I'm afraid of, is that she's so heart-broken she's sick and can't come at all.

NANCY. Fiddlesticks! We've all been through it and managed to live.

BLOSSY. Yes, an' I guess we can all remember plain

enough the suffering of it. How it was when we touched everything for the last time and said goodbye to this and that—that you'd looked at every day and never thought to leave. I can shut my eyes now and see the parlor with mother's parlor set and the wax flowers on the spinnet. I can see my bureau and the glass that always turned just right and always caught the light so's a body could see. And I can see the pin cushion with the daisies around it. But my—my, the worst was shutting the door for the last time, when you'd looked and looked till your eyes was—[*Her voice breaks.*]

MRS. HOMANS [*After a long pause in which memory surges over them all*] You don't need to recall it to me, I had a home that would have broken any woman's heart to leave.

SARAH JANE. You talk like the rest of us must o' lived in a hay mow. I guess I can see my father's house plain enough without shuttin' my eyes to do it or goin' through any eloquent contortions. It's the milk-house that gits me the most, where I done my churnin' in the cool of the evenin' with father settin' near on the back porch smokin' his pipe—and the cows stretchin' their necks over the meader fence to us, with that low sweet bawlin' they do towards night, when the shaders begin to git longer and everything's kind o' still.

NANCY. [*Sniffing, but still crocheting and rocking*] I guess I got as much to remember as anybody, if it comes to thet, but it ain't no use talkin' about it. I try to fergit it. Our house was always full—weddin's an' funerals an' babies bein' born—an' life—life goin'

on. Such a thing as one o' us endin' up in a old ladies' home would a bin too comical to think of. Nobody from good families ever could be connected with such a place! How little you know! Death takes first one an' then another an' the comfortable supply you took for granted was goin' on forever, dwindles before you know it—an' all your pride you'd lived on so long seems kind o' ridiculous, an' you're so thankful you've *got* the hundred dollars that'll git you in here—you can't think of anything else for a while,—'till after you're here an' settled—an' realize one day's goin' to be jist like the other 'till the end. [*Turning fiercely to Blossy.*] Talk about shuttin' things up an' sayin' goodbye—why I ain't done nothin' *but* say goodbye to people *an'* things for the last twenty years.—My life was so full I ain't got used to the emptiness, not even yet. [*She stops with a sob.*]

ABIGAIL [*Wistfully—wiping her eyes slowly on a corner of her apron*] There's one thing you all ain't got to remember that I have—an' thet is little children on yer breast, little hands on your cheek when you held 'em to nurse. They was all took away from me, some when they was little, some when they was growed up, but I've *had* 'em. Jim wandered off—jist got tired an' slipped away from me, restless, like men git sometimes, but I had *him* too. I allus thought he took up with some other woman somewheres an' give her a big family too, but thet don't matter much in the long run. Things turn out jist about as they've got to, so fer as I kin see. I'm old now and not up to strugglin' much more with anything—an' I've come to think that altho' the bed I sleep in ain't mine—it was provided by

kindness and good intentions, an' I made up my mind when I come here, to put my head down on my pillar at night with nothing but thankfulness in it—and let all the rest go.

NANCY [*After another pause*] There's a awful lot in thet—ef you can only bring yourself to see it.

BLOSSY. There's everything in it, and I've been thinking all day today about Angie and how much worse her coming is than any of ours,—because she's got to say goodbye today, not only to her home, but to her husband—and I thought all of a sudden what a selfish old thing I was to be living here in the best room, just because I happened to have a little extra to pay—when the little room at the head of the back stairs that Angie was going to have would do for me just as well as not—and that if all thirty of us would consent to it we could take Abe in with Angie and they could have my big room. [*There is a gasp of astonishment from the others.*]

NANCY AND SARAH JANE. What!

MRS. HOMANS. You're proposing a very astonishing thing.

SARAH JANE. Unheard of! A man alone in the house with thirty women?

BLOSSY. Why not? He'd be *Old Lady 31*.

NANCY. Land sakes!

SARAH JANE. Mercy on us!

MRS. HOMANS. Good gracious!

ABIGAIL. Thet takes right hold of me, Blossy.

NANCY. How you goin' to vittle him? I ain't hed a second dish o' peas this year.

ABIGAIL. We can have less meat and more turnips.

NANCY. Awful bad for my indigestion.

SARAH JANE. Ef you'd slow up some on eatin', Nancy Smith, you wouldn't hev no indigestion.

ABIGAIL. Where there's a will there's a way—an' ef the rest o' you is willin' I ain't afeerd to undertake to feed thirty-one, ample on what it takes to feed thirty.

BLOSSY. I'm more than willing. My—my—think of having a man in the house! [*She giggles with pleasant anticipation.*]

NANCY [*Turning to Blossy*] Murder will out. *Thet's* why you're gittin' so charitable all of a sudden.

SARAH JANE. I thought there was a nigger in the wood pile. [*To Abigail.*] I'm flat-footed agin it. It's preposterous and ridiculous. We ought to know when we're well off without gittin' mixed up with the male sex.

MRS. HOMANS. You're perfectly right, Sarah Jane. I haven't any use for this wild idea, and I'm certain the board of managers will never consent.

ABIGAIL [*Rising and taking the bowl of apples*] Let's go in and ask the other girls what they think.

MRS. HOMANS. But you must state the case. No pleading. [*She follows Abigail into the house.*]

NANCY. I'm a goin' to speak out my mind plain against it.

BLOSSY. [*Patting Nancy's face*] Now Nancy, don't say too much.

NANCY. Don't *do* that, Blossy, I don't like it!

BLOSSY. [*Seeing Mary who runs across the grass*] Bless me, here's Mary! Ain't she good for sore eyes! Howdy, Mary, howdy. [*Mary is eighteen, slender and*

delicate and lovely. She wears the long riding habit of the period and carries a whip, and a covered basket.]

MARY. Hello everybody. [*They all turn to Mary their faces warming with affection.*]

SARAH JANE. I was jist thinkin' about you, little girl.

NANCY. You ain't been here for three days.—My, but you look nice and bright and happy!

MRS. HOMANS. We missed you, my dear.

MARY [*Standing on the grass and looking up at them all*] I am glad. You can't guess what's in my basket.

BLOSSY. Something good, we know that, dearie. Bless your bright eyes!

MARY. It's the most wonderful one that ever was. I did it myself.

NANCY. Let's see, Mary. You're always doin' somethin' fine for us.

MARY [*Opening the basket*] It's a ham and I boiled it.

SARAH JANE. Well, I want to know!

BLOSSY. Wouldn't that beat you?

MRS. HOMANS. How did you make it boil? You're just a baby.

MARY. Nobody helped me. I got a cook book and did it myself. Hello Aunt Abigail. I brought you a cold ham for your supper. [*As Abigail comes onto the porch again.*]

ABIGAIL. What did I tell you? Ef we take him in the Lord will provide.

MARY [*Sitting on the steps*] Take who?

BLOSSY [*Going down to sit R. of Mary*] A man—

Angie's husband. We're going to put it to a vote so's he won't have to go to the poor farm.

MARY. Oh *do!* I passed them—they're trudging along the road with a little wagon. Oh *do!* It would be the most beautiful thing in the world.

SARAH JANE. You're young, child. You ain't hed enough experience of life to know that one man to thirty women is a terrible poor arrangement.

ABIGAIL [*Taking the basket*] Come on girls. I'll take the basket, Mary. Thank you, honey. [*She goes back into the house.—Sarah, Nancy, and Mrs. Homans follow her.*]

BLOSSY. Excuse us, won't you lovey?

[*John a handsome boy of twenty darts in and seeing Blossy hides behind the rain barrel at right of porch. He is tanned and ruddy—bareheaded and wearing overalls. He has a shingle in his hand.*]

MARY. Make them do it, Aunt Blossy. Be your very sweetest.

BLOSSY. Not much use being sweet to women. [*John tosses the shingle on the grass.*] What was that?

MARY. [*Seeing John who peeks around the barrel*] Only a shingle.

BLOSSY [*Not seeing John*] John is shingling the other side of the roof. They're flying around thick. [*She goes into the house.*]

JOHN [*Coming slowly to Mary*] I saw you galloping down the road. [*Sprawling on the step beside Mary.*]

MARY. How's the roof?

JOHN. Most finished.

MARY. You ought to be *building* houses instead of *mending* them.

JOHN. Uh huh.

MARY. Have you drawn any new ones?

JOHN. One—last night—the best of all.

MARY. What's it like?

JOHN. [*Looking at her warmly*] A little one—for two.

MARY. Oh, everything you do is just for two. Why don't you do big ones—and churches—with great steeples stretching into the sky?

JOHN. If I drew all the things I see, the sky wouldn't hold them. By cricky, there's a bird's nest. [*Getting the chair by the door he puts it near the post and stands on it*] Come up and see it.

MARY. Can't.

JOHN. Yes you can. Get a chair and stand on it.

MARY. Can't.

JOHN. It's a blue bird's. There's three little eggs in it.

MARY. [*Getting up from the steps quickly*] There are not.

JOHN. Honest.

MARY. Hold them up. Let me see.

JOHN. You got to come up. They might break.

MARY. [*Jumping on the porch she gets a chair and places it left of post—standing on it*] I can't see them.

JOHN. Put your hand in.

MARY. [*Reaching into the nest*] Don't let me squash them.

JOHN. You won't. [*Taking out two eggs he puts them in her hands—keeping the other one*]

MARY. Aren't they darling? Little delicate, fragile things! Isn't it wonderful? Gracious, aren't they the most beautiful things you ever saw?

JOHN [*Looking at her*] Not so beautiful as something else.

MARY. What? [*Shutting her eyes and turning her head away*] Silly!

JOHN. Open your eyes.

MARY. No.

JOHN. Please.

MARY. No. Put them back.

JOHN. No.

MARY. Please, John.

[*She gives John the eggs—flushed and shy from her closeness to him.*] It's warm isn't it? I must be going. [*Mary jumps down from the chair to the porch*] Oh, do you know what they're doing, the old ladies? [*Sitting on the steps again*]

JOHN. What? [*Throwing himself down beside her*]

MARY. Voting on taking in an old man so he can be with his wife.

JOHN. What? To live here?

MARY. Isn't it sweet?

[*John rolls over laughing.*]

Well, I don't see anything so funny about it—I must say. Ssh! They'll hear you.

JOHN. I'll give him about a week to cut his throat or run away.

MARY. You're horrid! It's a beautiful thing for them to do.

JOHN. [*Still chuckling*] Why even old Mike lives in a shack as far away from the house as he can get—to get away from the women. He won't let one of them go near the garden and won't even go into the kitchen. Just dumps the vegetables on the back porch. I don't blame him.

MARY. Poor old things! They've all had beaux and sweethearts sometime, I suppose.

JOHN. Hard to believe.

MARY. No, it isn't, if you use your imagination. They were all young once, really young like us—dancing and laughing and having fun. Funny, isn't it?

JOHN. Pretty funny. I can imagine Blossy may have had her little fling, but not Sarah Jane.

MARY. Yes, even Sarah Jane. Everybody loves somebody, sometime, I suppose.

JOHN. Do they? [*Looking at her again deeply and wistfully and lowering his head near her shoulder*]

MARY. [*Pulling his hair*] Goodness, but your hair is thick, John. I wonder if you'll ever be bald and grey.

JOHN. [*Looking up at her*] You won't.

MARY. Oh yes, I will.

JOHN. No you won't, you'll always be just as you are. [*They look at each other—John kisses her cheek. —Blossy calls from the house "Oh Mary! Mary!" John jumps up. Mary motions him to go. He runs off. Mary rises—Blossy comes onto the porch.*]

MARY. [*Anxiously*] Are they going to take him?

BLOSSY. Oh Mary, it went wrong. That is—I could have persuaded them, but Nancy and Sarah Jane, and Mrs. Homans were so opposed to it—they just behaved dreadful.

MARY. What a shame!

BLOSSY. You see, they're the kind of women that ain't got a man theirselves and don't want nobody else to have one. I'm not that way. I like one around—most any kind. [*Giggling and dimpling and fluttering*]

[*Abigail, Sarah Jane, Mrs. Homans, Nancy, Elizabeth and Minerva come back onto the porch talking as they enter.*]

ABIGAIL. [*Speaking above the others and going down the steps*] I'm a goin' down the road to meet them, and not let Abe come up with Angie. If you're all so set agin' him, I don't want the poor old thing to come up to the house at all.

NANCY. Neither do we. I wouldn't speak to him if he did come.

SARAH JANE. You better just mention to him in the first place that he ain't to be coming here to see Angie.

ABIGAIL. [*Secing Abe and Angie*] Ssh! Ssh!

[*There is a sudden hush—Abe and Angie come in—Abe dragging the little wagon—Angie carrying the flowers she picked*] Howdy, Angie, howdy. [*Abigail embraces Angie warmly.*] I'm mighty glad to see you, and you too, Abe. [*Going to him to put her hand on his shoulder*]

ANGIE. Howdy everybody. Why, Blossy. [*Em-*

bracing her and turning to the others] My, but it's nice to see old friends! And there's Nancy Smith. Well, well! [*Abe slowly takes the trunk off of the wagon, placing it at the end of porch, leaving the grip on the wagon*]

NANCY. How do, Angie. [*Acidly*]

BLOSSY. Angie—this is Sarah Jane.

SARAH JANE. Welcome. [*Giving Angie her hand stiffly and solemnly*]

BLOSSY. [*Keeping up her gayest social manner*] And Mrs. Homans, our last sister but you to come.

MRS. HOMANS. [*With great elegance*] How do you do.

ANGIE. [*Dropping a curtsy*] I'm proud to know you.

ABIGAIL. You'll git acquainted with all soon enough.

ANGIE. Of course I will. And this is my husband, Captain Abe Rose. I made him come up with me because I knew you'd all be so glad to see him. [*There is a self-conscious moment for them all*] He picked these flowers for you ladies, though when he done it, he didn't know he'd have the honor of presenting them to you in person. [*Giving the flowers to Blossy and seeing Mary*] And who's this lovely young thing? [*Mary moves eagerly towards Angie.*]

ABIGAIL. That's our Mary—Squire Ridgeway's daughter. Her pa's President of our Board.

ANGIE. You don't say. Howdy, Mary.

MARY. How do you do. I hope you'll let me call you *Aunt* Angie.

ANGIE. You dear little thing! If you only would!

There ain't nothing could be so sweet. Ain't it nice to have something so young about the place? Abe, this is Squire Ridgeway's daughter.

MARY. How do you do.

ANGIE. Ain't she sweet, Abe?

ABE. She certain air.

NANCY. [*Addressing the air in her niftiest way*] Men always does like young faces.

ABE. Hello, that you, Nancy? I like all kinds. As fer thet, I don't know as I ever see a cleverer or more amiable set o' gals than these here 'pears to be. [*A flutter of pleasure passes over them all.*] I know now it's all lies the talk about the way you gals quarrel an' fight amongst yourselves. Don't see how any such yarn ever got started. They've even went so fer as to say you— [*Angie turns to Abe and coughs—he takes the hint*] And here you be as gentle as suckin' doves.

ANGIE. I knew Abe would appreciate you all—once he saw you.

ABE. Don't take more'n one squint to do thet. But I'll be jogging along now, mother. [*Turning to go and slowly picking up the grip*]

ANGIE. [*Taking his arm*] I'll go down to the gate with you, father.

ABIGAIL. [*Quickly*] Girls—don't you think we might ask Abe to stay to supper?

BLOSSY. Oh yes—oh yes—do—do.

ABIGAIL. What say—Mrs. Homans?

MRS. HOMANS. Whatever the other ladies think. I don't wish to appear inhospitable.

ANGIE. Ain't they kind, Abe?

ABE. They certain air. Thank you kindly fer

your hospitality, ladies—but I—I'm kinda busy this evenin'—I'll be joggin' along. [*He takes the tongue of the wagon and starts to go*]

ANGIE [*Clinging to him*] I'll walk a piece with you, father. You see he'd like to stay ladies, but he—we—if you'll excuse us I'll jist walk down the road a little way. [*They go off*]

SARAH JANE. [*After an eloquent pause*] I ain't so sartain we're doin' the right thing. Angie clings to him with her soul.

BLOSSY. [*In tears*] Her heart's broke.

ABIGAIL. You all don't know what she's goin' through.

NANCY. I guess I got feelings ef I *ain't* married. I ain't agin takin' him at all. In fact—come to think of it—I think we ought—as Christian women.

MRS. HOMANS. I *thought* you were making a hasty decision.

MARY. Oh, do take him. I'll get father to make the Board agree and they will if he says so.

BLOSSY. Oh girls, 'tain't too late yet. Can't we call him back, can't we?

SARAH JANE. Why not? We ain't tongue-tied.

BLOSSY. Run, Abigail, you do it. Bring 'em back.

MARY. I'll go with you.

ABIGAIL. The Lord will reward you for this, girls. [*Abigail runs off calling "Angie—Angie—Abe—Abe."* Mary follows her]

SARAH JANE. Ef you'll all hold back a mite on the apple sass, they'll be a heapin' dishful for Abe.

BLOSSY. Oughtn't we to call him "Brother Abe"?

NANCY. Of course. We must make him to home,

now that we're doin' it. Makes me think, I've got a hand-painted mustache cup ain't doin' no good to nobody. I'll just run an' fetch it an' give it to him as a kind o' welcome. [*She hurries into the house.*]

BLOSSY. You are sweet, Nancy. I'll just look around my room and leave as many things as I can spare to make 'em comfortable.

MRS. HOMANS. I have a number of things that belonged to my late husband that the Captain might as well have.

SARAH JANE. I ain't got no finery to offer, but I'm willin' to put in extry work. And a man makes it—let me tell you.

MRS. HOMANS. Here they come.

ABIGAIL. [*Coming back out of breath*] Girls, girls, I give Captain Rose your message and him and Angie has consented to stay. [*Angie and Abe come back with the wagon.*]

ANGIE. We—we jist can't say nothin'.

BLOSSY. 'Tain't necessary. The ladies has elected me to speak a word of welcome to Brother Abe, and tell him we hope he will be one of us in the same spirit of friendliness in which we invite you.

NANCY. [*Coming back with the mustache cup—which she holds out to Abe*] And as a memento o' the occasion an' an auspicious beginning, I present you this here mustache cup with our compliments.

ANGIE. [*Taking the cup and giving it to Abe*] You see ladies, Abe ain't used to makin' speeches, an' he's overcome with gratitude. It's a beautiful cup, an' this is a great honor you have conferred upon him. To lay down tonight—together—among friends is—

well, I guess you all know—that's why you done it. All Abe an' me can say is, we hope you won't never be sorry you took us in together—an' God bless you.

[*Turning to Abe—she unfolds her handkerchief*]
You see, Abe, I'm glad I kept it folded.

ABIGAIL [*Choking back her tears*] Well, I must go at the supper. Sarah Jane, you an' me must go in. [*She goes into the house followed by Sarah.*]

NANCY. I'll come an' lay the table—an' Abe, I'll put you at the head. [*Beaming at Abe she goes in.*]

MRS. HOMANS. You may have heard of my late husband, Captain. You remind me somewhat of him.

ABE. Thank you ma'am. Thank you.
[*With a sweeping bow Mrs. Homans goes into the house.*]

BLOSSY. I'll get your room ready and have Mike come and bring your trunk up the back way. [*She goes. Abe sits on the steps, putting the cup on the porch.*]

ANGIE. Abe, it's nothing short of a miracle thet we're here. Ain't they kind an' friendly though? They couldn't be more so, could they?

ABE. No—they couldn't, but they's an awful lot of 'em—an' I ain't seen half yit.

ANGIE [*Going up onto the porch*] Well, you like gals, an' you needn't pretend you don't.

ABE. Yes, but I like 'em one at a time.

ANGIE. See what a pretty stretch o' medder over yonder. You don't know what it means to me to know thet you're settin' right there on them steps and thet I kin reach out an' touch you. Oh, the blessed Lord hes been good to us this day. Come on, I want you to

slick up a bit for supper. Come on. [*Tapping his shoulder*]

ABE. I can't do it, Angie.

ANGIE. Can't?

ABE. I can't do it.

ANGIE. Can't walk up?

ABE. Can't face them females. It's come over me like a terrible ignominy. Me, a sea-captain—used to bein' obeyed by the cussedest dogs o' men. I can't do anything so weak an' womanish as this.

ANGIE. [*Bending down to him*] Don't you think I know how you feel? Do it for my sake. Can't you think jist o' the blessed peace o' bein' together—an' fergit everything else? Come on. Come. [*He rises—going up onto the porch.—She takes his arm.—They stand facing the door.*]

ABE. I don't know now whether I'm a man or a woman, Angie.

ANGIE. I'll *lean* on you. You won't never have no chance to fergit you're a man. [*They go through the door as the curtain falls.*]

ACT II

TIME: *Three months later. An afternoon in late autumn.*

SCENE: *The sitting room at "the Home." A wide deep room in an old Colonial house with large fireplace at C. back. A window is at R. of fireplace, two windows in L. side of room. A single door at L. of fireplace leading into hall. Double doors at R. leading into the dining room. The furniture is all old-fashioned and much worn. The general effect that of cleanliness and comfort. The stairway is seen in the hall, when the door is open.*

AS THE CURTAIN RISES: *Blossy and Abe are seated by the fireplace. Abe is wearing a quilted dressing jacket ornamented with bright tassels, obviously a gift. Blossy is looking fresh and alluring with a gay jacket over her faded frock.*

BLOSSY [*Holding a letter in her hand*] He don't use many words but he writes a beautiful letter and they come as regular the third day of the month—as sure as doomsday.

ABE. Yes—Sam'l Darby was allers a man o' few words. When we was together at the life savin' station, one word from him was worth fifty from anybody else fer keepin' the men in line. Why didn't you take him long ago, Blossy, and git done with it?

BLOSSY. Maybe I *am* too fastidious—but his wig being always over one ear and the mole on the end of

his nose just fidgets me so—somehow I never got myself to the point where I could decide to face it forever. Forever is an awful long time to live with a man's faults.

ABE. An' a mole on the end of a man's nose is a very small matter. You hev to look deeper'n thet.

BLOSSY. I know, I know, but oh sakes, Abe, if men only knew what nice little ways meant to a woman!

ABE. That's what a man's got a right to expect in a woman, but a woman ought to know enough to look fer more important things in a man.

BLOSSY [*Taking another letter from the old leather writing case she holds on her lap*] You won't think I'm bold, Abe, if I read this to you? I'm not betraying Samuel's confidence—I'm just seeking your masculine advice. I've lived with women so long I've kind o' got all milk and watery and can't make up my mind to nothing.

ABE [*Complacently*] I understand. Fire away.

BLOSSY [*Reading the letter.*]

"Dear Blossy:

If you'll marry me, I'll make you a good husband and you won't never have no cause to complain of my conduct.

Yours truly, SAMUEL DARBY."

Here's another one:

"Dear Blossy:

I'll make you a awful good husband if you'd only make up your mind to marry me and my conduct would always be above complaint.

Yours truly, SAMUEL DARBY."

I'm takin' them just as they come.

"Dear Blossy:

My mind's made up to one thing; I'd make you a terrible good husband if you could only see it, and as to conduct you wouldn't never have no cause to complain of mine. Yours truly, SAMUEL DARBY."

And here's—

ABE. So fer as I kin see you don't need to go no further. Them letters shows a fine character—stickin' to the p'int an' never deviatin' from it. What more could you ask fer?

BLOSSY. Samuel has been faithful, I must say that for him. Thirty years he's been courtin' me.

ABE. Well—I should call thet more habit than faithfulness—but you'd be an awful fool not to take him. The only fight me an' Sam'l ever hed was over speculatin'. I put a lot of money in Tenaflly gold stocks an' he salted his away. I wish now I'd a took his advice. He's got a tidy little sum put by, an' a good two story an' a half house.

BLOSSY. He says he built that house for me.

ABE. Then either say "*yes*" and git in it, or say "*no*" an' let him git somebody else.

BLOSSY. I—I—I'm just comin' to the principal part. His regular letter didn't come last time, so I wrote an' asked him if he wasn't feelin' well, and this is his answer.

"Dear Blossy:

I never felt better in my life. Ain't been sick a minute. Just made up my mind I was an old fool and

was going to quit. If you change your intentions at any time just drop me a line.

SAMUEL DARBY, Esquire."

[*She is dissolved in tears.*]

ABE. Good fer Sam'l! I like his spunk. Serves you right—foolin' with a honest man. [*Blossy sobs.*] There—there—churk up and send him the line. He's woke up. When a man's been a'courtin' *one* woman as long as that, he's goin' to hev *somebody*. You snap him up quick.

BLOSSY [*Drying her eyes*] You won't say anything to the girls about this?

ABE. Don't worry. I ain't bin here three months without learnin' to know *nothing* about nothing.

BLOSSY [*Leaning forward and lowering her voice*] Not even Angie.

ABE. There's some things a man—

NANCY [*Opening the hall door wide enough to put her head in*] Who's in here? Land sakes—you two here all alone? Where's *Angie*?

[*Nancy comes in and Blossy, much flustered, quickly puts her apron over the letter case. Nancy eyes it suspiciously and goes to sit in a low rocker.*]

ABE. Angy's outside, knockin' about somewheres.

NANCY [*Beginning to rock and taking out of her bag a pair of wristlets which she is knitting*] Oh, *is* she? I should a thought you'd a bin with her.

ABE [*Rising and spreading himself before the fire—his feet wide apart*] I'm purty comfortable. It's a little nippy outside.

NANCY. Yes and Blossy bein' such good company

time passes fast. I 'spose you ain't got an idee *what* time it is, Blossy.

BLOSSY [*Beaming at Abe*] Not when I'm with Brother Abe.

NANCY. You got your work under your apern? Why don't you go ahead with it?

BLOSSY. It's a secret. I'm keepin' it from everybody but Abe.

NANCY. I ain't no hand fer hidin' things. Whatever I do is open and above board. Now, I'm knittin' these wristlets fer Brother Abe and I don't keer who knows it.

ABE [*Winking at Nancy*] You hain't tried 'em on fer some time. Don't you think you order?

NANCY [*A little mollified*] No—not now!

BLOSSY. Is that a hint for me to go?

MRS. HOMANS [*Coming in from the hall—carrying a man's large handkerchief in her small sewing bag*] Oh, *there* you are, Brother Abe. I saw Angy go down the path all alone and I wondered *why*.

NANCY [*Insinuating as much as possible*] Yes, he's *here*.

ABE. Come in Mis' Homans. This is a good settin' chair.

MRS. HOMANS. Oh thank you, Brother Abe. It is nice to be considered a little. [*Taking Abe's chair—much flattered by this gallant attention*]

ABE. Are you all warm enough ladies? Becus ef you ain't, I'll go right out an' git a armful of—

NANCY. Oh no—no! We're plenty warm.

BLOSSY. 'Tain't your place at all to do that, Abe.

NANCY. It's thet ornery old Mike's business to keep the box full.

MRS. HOMANS [*Beginning to hem the handkerchief*] Where's *your* work, Blossy?

NANCY. She's hidin' it under her apern. Don't seem to want *us* to see it. That's quite a sizable handkerchief Mis' Homans. 'Tain't fer yourself is it?

MRS. HOMANS. No, it isn't. I just thought in some of my idle moments I might hem a few for Brother Abe here.

BLOSSY. Dear me! He *is* gettin' lots of nice things, isn't he?

NANCY. You any objections?

BLOSSY [*Boldly caressing Abe with her smile*] Not a bit. I want him to be treated the best in the land.

ABE [*Monopolizing the fire and spreading himself comfortably*] No man was ever treated handsomer, girls. I will say that fer you.

NANCY [*With a testy glance towards Blossy*] Some folks act like they was the only woman knew *how* to treat a man.

ABE. Well, you've each one got your own special p'int. Now take you Mis' Homans—you—

SARAH JANE [*Coming in from the hall carrying a large darning basket filled with woolen socks*] I thought likely—[*Looking insinuatingly from Abe to the women.*]

BLOSSY. Come in, Sarah Jane. I declare even you've brought in your fancy work. Now ain't that nice?

SARAH JANE. Ain't nothin' very fancy 'bout *my* work. [*Holding up a sock—showing a large hole in*

the heel] I see these when they come out o' the wash.

BLOSSY. Ain't you well took care of, Brother Abe?

SARAH JANE. I don't notice thet *you're* doin much.

NANCY. Don't ask questions. Blossy's hidin' hern under her apern. It's a secret.

BLOSSY [*Laughing with pleased excitement at the jealousy*] Yes—it is.

SARAH—NANCY—MRS. HOMANS. I don't believe in secrets among friends. Why shouldn't you show us?

[*The three women talk at once growing garrulous, as Angie comes in from the hall. She looks like a little autumn berry with her red cheeks and her snuff brown dress and her red cape. She carries a bunch of red and brown flowers and a small basket. Her dress is tucked up to protect it.*]

ANGIE. My, my, how nice and cosey you look! I knew Abe wouldn't be lonely. See here, ain't they lovely? [*She goes to let Blossy sniff the flowers and then to Nancy. Blossy nervously clutches the apron covering the letters.*] They come so late it makes me love 'em 'specially. Somehow they always make me think of *us*—autumn you know—almost nipped by the winter, but blossomin' away as cheery as can be. Well Abe, is the girls too warm? You 'pear to be actin' as a fire screen for 'em. Could I jist git a little nibble fer the tips o' my fingers? [*She laughs and pushes Abe to one side, stretching her fingers to the fire.*]

ABE. I offered to git more wood.

ANGIE. I declare it looks like every one of 'em was makin' somethin' fer a man. Blossy, what's the matter? What you doin'?

NANCY. I wouldn't ask questions ef I was you, Angie.

BLOSSY. I got to go up to my room a minute. I forgot something—but I declare I can't open the door.

ANGIE. Abe'll do thet for you.

ABE. I reckon I kin. [*Abe goes to open the door for Blossy, the women all watching with curiosity and jealousy, except Angie, who beams contentedly. Blossy drops a letter—Abe picks it up.*]

BLOSSY. I never see a man with better manners. Thank you, Abe, thank you.

ABE. You kinda bring out a feller's manners, Blossy.

BLOSSY. You couldn't a said nothin' prettier. [*She stands on her tiptoes and whispers something in Abe's ear—he bends towards her listening and then chuckles. She flutters out. Abe closes the door and goes back to spread himself before the fire.*]

SARAH JANE [*Shivering*] Blossy always could keep a door open longer goin' out than any woman I ever see.

NANCY. Talk about manners—she ain't got any to spare—whisperin' in company.

ANGIE [*Arranging the flowers in the water jug on the table*] You can always be sure Blossy's whisperin' ain't no harm though.

MRS. HOMANS. Can you?

NANCY. Just to prove it, Brother Abe, you might tell us what she said.

ABE. W-e-ll—now, Nancy, ef *you* was a whisperin' somethin' in my ear, there ain't no power on earth'd make me divulge it.

NANCY [*Tittering*] Oh you go on!

ABIGAIL [*Entering from the dining room with a note—Her face flushed and her sleeves rolled up*] Look

a here! Thet blessed angel Mary has sent a note sayin' she's comin' over this afternoon to give us a tea party.

NANCY. She's a lamb.

SARAH JANE. Always up to somethin'.

MRS. HOMANS. She's a good girl.

ABIGAIL. I run in to warn you so's you could all git into your best bib an' tucker an' do yourselves proud.

MRS. HOMANS. That certainly is a good idea. A little dignity won't hurt us. [*She goes into the hall and up the stairs.*]

NANCY. I ain't hed out my best silk this year. I reckon this is about the best chanct I'll git to wear it. [*Following Mrs. Homans.*]

SARAH JANE. I don't know as I've got time to more'n slick my hair. [*Going out after Nancy.*]

ABIGAIL. I must run. I left my bread in the oven. [*Hurrying into the dining room.*]

ANGIE. You better put on your best coat, Abe. [*Getting a skein of bright yarn from the piano.*]

ABE. I'll be glad to git this thing off. [*Pulling at his jacket.*]

ANGIE [*Putting her yarn over the back of a chair to wind it*] You must wear it often though, dearie. That's the greatest honor Mrs. Homans could have conferred upon you—giving you somethin' thet belonged to her late husband.

ABE. I got my opinion o' her late husband ef he liked these gol darn tassels.

ANGIE. I've had a nice little tramp around looking at this and that, making plans for the garden next

spring. You ought to a bin out with me trampin' 'round. You stay in the house more than you used to and it ain't good for you. Thet ain't the way to keep young.

ABE. Blossy wanted to ask my advice about a little somethin', so I stayed in jist to *please* her.

ANGIE. That was right—but don't please one any more than you do t'other.

ABE. Huh?

ANGIE. They're all a little bit nettled now 'bout them letters o' Blossy's.

ABE. Now, mother, there wasn't nothin' fer you to mind.

ANGIE. *Me* mind? O' course not. I mean the others. Let me put this little flea in your ear. Women kin be the wisest and most Christian about everything under the sun, and be plumb fools and wildcats about a man. Jist remember to spread your favors even to 'em all. You're a hero now, Abe. But it's an awful dangerous thing to be a hero—fer nine cases out of ten they fall down an' never git up again. History an' daily life teaches us thet.

ABE. Don't you fret, mother. Ef I can't take keer o' myself amongst a passel o' women, I might's well lay down an' die.

ANGIE. I know you mean to, dearie, but dreadful big squalls comes out of mighty small clouds. I'll trot along now and put on my silk dress, too. I ain't wore it sence I bin here. You come up in time so's I kin make your hair lay smooth in the back. Don't dawdle now. [*She starts to the door as Mary opens it. Mary is wearing a long cloak and carrying a*

large basket of cakes.] Come in, lovie—come in. My, I'm glad to see you!

MARY [*Kissing Angie on both cheeks*] I'm glad to see you. How are you, Uncle Abe?

ABE. Fine—fine! How's yourself? You're lookin' bright as a button.

ANGIE [*Putting the basket on the table and looking at the cakes*] Take off your coat, Mary dear, and Abe'll hang it in the hall fer you.

ABE [*Taking the cape*] I ain't much fer tea parties but I guess I'll hev to come to this one, bein' as it's Mary's. [*He goes out—closing the door. Mary grasps Angie excitedly by the arms and whirls her about.*]

MARY. Does anybody know?

ANGIE. Nary a soul of 'em's guessed or got the least suspicion. Abe don't even remember hisself it's his *birthday*. [*Turning to look at the window as John appears outside measuring the sash with a rule.*] Oh, it's John measurin' something. What are you doin', John, out there?

JOHN. Huh?

ANGIE [*Opening the window*] What are you doing out there?

JOHN [*From outside*] Measuring for the new storm-windows you're going to have for winter.

ANGIE. My, ain't that nice? Here's Mary inside. She's come to give us a tea party. If you'd climb in an' do a little measurin' on the inside, you might git invited. Mightn't he, Mary?

MARY [*With icy dignity*] No.

ANGIE [*Looking at her in surprise*] Why not? One

man's a comin'—might as well hev two. Leastways, you might git a cake. Here—[*Opening the basket and putting a cake on the table*] The feller that's got the courage gits this cake. I must reach down the blue cups and saucers and get the silver cake basket out. Don't look so scared. When she's the spunkiest she's carin' the most. [*She goes into dining room with the basket.*]

JOHN. Aren't you going to give me the cake?

MARY. Certainly not.

JOHN. I can't come in—my boots are muddy.

MARY. You'd better close the window, then.

JOHN. Do you hate me now?

MARY. Why didn't you come to my party last night?

JOHN. I *couldn't*.

MARY. You mean you didn't want to.

JOHN. Oh, if you don't understand, I—

MARY. I asked you to come to my house to meet my father and my mother.

JOHN. I couldn't. You know why.

MARY. I shall never ask you again.

JOHN. I'll never come till I can come as good as anybody. I'll never come while folks wonder why you asked me. I'm going to clear out and get away—[*She turns slowly to look at him*] and I'm going to stay till I can—till you—till I've done something to make you—[*He lowers his eyes—she goes quickly to the window.*]

MARY. To make me what? Tell me, John. [*Putting her hand on his arm*] Is that why you didn't come? [*He nods his head.*] You don't need to go

away to make *me* know you're better than all the rest. But do it—do it and come back—and make *them* know it, too.

JOHN. Do *you* believe I can?

MARY. Yes.

JOHN. And make your father—believe, too?

MARY. Yes.

JOHN. And—will it—mean—anything—to you?

MARY. It will mean everything in the world.

JOHN. I can do it—*now*. [*Catching her to him. Angie comes back suddenly. John and Mary start guiltily apart.*]

ANGIE [*Looking at the cake which is still on the table*] You didn't get it.

JOHN. She wouldn't give it to me.

MARY. He wouldn't come in. He didn't have the courage after all.

ANGIE. Then I'll give it to him. [*Taking the cake to John*] You see, she wants you to earn it and deserve it, but I've got over makin' folks deserve everything they git.

JOHN [*Devouring the cake*] Thanks Aunt Angie.

ANGIE. You're welcome. God bless you, boy! Life's callin' to you. Don't be afraid of it.

JOHN. Goodbye, Goodbye. [*Angie waves her hand to him and closes the window.*]

ANGIE. My! the girl that gets 'that boy is goin' to be lucky. Don't you think so? Law, don't hang your head—hold it up. You ain't ashamed of his kiss, are you?

MARY [*Hiding her face on Angie's shoulder*] How did you know?

ANGIE. I seen it in your faces. 'Tain't like no other look on earth. It's love.

MARY. Mother and father think he's only a carpenter—but he's going to be a great architect. He's proud because he's so—so—

ANGIE. So poor. Bless you, child, thet only adds spice to it. He'll climb the harder and faster to git you.

MARY. He dreams the most wonderful things—about houses and things. It sounds foolish to other people.

ANGIE. Foolish? Sometimes I think the dreamin' is more important than the facts. What we fall short of, is not livin' up to 'em. You dream high fer him, dearie, and keep your faith.

MARY. Oh! I wish my mother were like you. She only believes in what she *sees*.

ANGIE. When I look at you I seem to see the little heads that never laid on my breast. Oh, my dear—my dear—[*Taking Mary's face in her hands*] How sweet you are! [*She kisses her with passionate tenderness. Abe enters from the hall with his hair-brush.*] Gracious, here's father a'ready an' I ain't moved. You see that the kettle's boilin', dearie. [*Mary hurries into the dining room.*]

ABE. I brung the brush down, Mother.

ANGIE [*Brushing Abe's refractory locks*] They're awful stubborn. Never hev got broke in all these years I been at 'em. But I kinda like 'em somehow. If they was to take a notion to lay down, I'd miss 'em dreadful. [*Pointing through the window*] There's that

darlin' boy again—workin' away. He ain't got neither father nor mother, Abe.

ABE. I watch him every day and wish he was my boy. If things hed bin different, Angie, we might of adopted him.

ANGIE. But it wasn't to be, Father—it wasn't to be. [*Mike looks in at the hall door. Mike is old and gnarled like a tough little pine knot. He is very deaf and a relentless hater of women. He draws back quickly when he sees Angie.*] Come in—Mike—come in. I'm goin'. He must a bin nipped terrible hard by some petticoat. [*She goes into the hall and up the stairs.*]

MIKE [*Coming back with an armful of wood which he puts in the woodbox by the fireplace*] These old hens burns more wood than they're worth.

ABE [*Standing with his back to fireplace and shouting to Mike*] You have to keep women-folks warm.

MIKE [*Poking the fire*] If I hed my way they'd all be drowned in the middle of the sea. How you're still out of your grave at all, here with the thirty of 'em, is what I don't understand. [*Mike speaks with a rich Irish brogue.*]

ABE. What I don't understand is, how one of 'em ain't married you.

MIKE. I make 'em keep their distance. It's the only way a man can live. If I didn't, they be after tellin' me how to chew me own food. They'll make a damned softy out o' you if you don't mind.

ABE [*Raising his voice*] I think one o' them's got her eye on you, Mike. She'll git you yit.

MIKE. What's that you're sayin'?

ABE. [*Shouting*] One o' them will git you yit.

MIKE. Like hell! Not while I've got my two legs to run with. [*Mike reaches the door—Nancy opens it—he dodges towards dining room—meets Mary—turns helplessly from one door to the other—darts past Nancy and comes face to face with Mrs. Homans in the hall—evading her he manages to escape.*]

ABE [*Enjoying the situation immensely*] You got him scared, Nancy. He thinks you're after him.

[*There is a great chattering and clattering as the women pour down the stairs and into the room—their voices shrill with an unusual happy expectancy and excitement. They have all donned their best frocks—the remains of bygone finery, and the strong bright colors make a bouquet of old-fashioned garden flowers. Their caps, their bits of jewelry and lace, all their best possessions are flaunted proudly for this gay occasion and the manners have taken on their best air and most proper form. Mrs. Homans in her stiff black with its voluminous skirt is an imposing and awe-inspiring figure in spite of her small stature. Sarah Jane's drabness and austerity are adorned in a stiff silk of wide stripes in red and green, and the brooch which fastens the collar is like a breastplate of defense. Blossy is more a quaint and faded rose than ever. She wears a ball gown of creamy lace, ruffled in billowy flounces up to the tiny bodice which displays her plump and dimpled shoulders. They pay each other pretty compliments as they admire each other's appearance with pride and gratified vanity—but they pay especial tribute to Angie who comes down a trifle late and whose*

best frock they have never seen before. They turn her round and round to see and admire its soft blue luster. She has made a stiff little bouquet which she holds tightly as she bows and smiles acknowledging their praise with happy tears in her eyes. The rest of the thirty inmates and Granny, with her cane, have all come to the party.]

ABIGAIL [*Speaking above the voices*] I sent the others right into the dining room, Mary, to make it easier for you.

MARY. That's nice. I'll give them their tea first. [*Mary runs into the dining room.*]

ANGIE. Well, girls, hasn't Mary given us a lovely tea party? But you don't know what a important occasion it is yet. It's no less a one, than your Brother Abe's birthday. An' I know it's goin' to be one o' the very happiest he ever had. Ain't it Abe! [*Courtesying low before Abe and presenting the bouquet.*]

ABE [*Radiantly rising to the occasion*] How could it be otherwise—surrounded as I am by this beevy o' beauty.

BLOSSY. It's the most lovely thing I ever heard of. Abe, I'm jist going to give you a birthday kiss for that. [*Blossy gives Abe's cheek a loud smack, much to the delight of Angie—but there is a sudden chill and shock in the room.*]

ABE [*Transported with delight*] Ain't there any more to foller?

MRS. HOMANS. I think a little dignity becomes us.

NANCY. I ain't so bold-minded as some.

ABIGAIL. Angie, why didn't you tell us, so a body

could give him a remembrance? [*Trying to restore the gaiety.*]

ANGIE. As if you wasn't all a givin' him somethin' every day. I'm jist watchin' to see how much he can stand an' keep his equilibrium. [*Angie and Abigail go into the dining room to help Mary prepare the feast.*]

BLOSSY [*Enjoying the jealousy of the others*] I declare, it's real cheery to look forward to havin' you here the whole winter through, Abe—when we're snowed in for so long.

ABE. Well, I'm goin' to do my best to make you all happy.

ANGIE [*Coming back with a tray holding the tea-cups*] Abe, you must go and sit with the rest of the girls a little. They want to congratulate you too.

BLOSSY. Of course they do. We mustn't monopolize him. Come along, Abe. [*Rising, she takes Abe's arm and marches him into the dining room.*]

ABE [*As he goes out*] I was allus dead set agin the Mormons, but I declare I begin to see a good deal in it.

NANCY. I call that an immoral illusion.

ANGIE [*Passing the tea tray*] Law me, Nancy, can't you take a joke?

NANCY [*Taking her cup with a sniff*] Not that one.

MRS. HOMANS [*Condescending to take her tea*] I blame Blossy rather than Abe. She provoked him to it.

SARAH JANE. They's some women allus hes thet effect on a man.

ANGIE. Oh, don't hold it up agin Blossy. All

men's got that side to 'em. They can't help it. Have some tea, Elizabeth. The trimmin's is comin' along.

ELIZABETH. I guess the best way to git any, is to go out where it is. [*Trotting into the dining room.*]

GRANNY. Where's Abe?

MINERVA. He's gone to get some tea.

GRANNY. Well, I want to go where Abe is. [*She hobbles into the dining room with Harriette*]

ANGIE [*Laughing*] Granny's jist as young as the rest of us. I'll git your cream an' sugar. I guess Mary's kind a flustered with so many. [*Angie goes into the dinning room. Voices and the clinking of china is heard.*]

NANCY. Girls, let me tell you something. Angie's as blind as a bat. Somebody ought to open her eyes. [*The three women lean towards each other with zest—scenting a scandal.*]

SARAH JANE. It's gone too far. Blossy's carryin' on with Abe right under our noses, as if the rest of us didn't count at all. Gits my dander up.

MRS. HOMANS. If I knew Angie as well as you do, Nancy, I should certainly tell her that Blossy is a dangerous woman, and that a scandal is going on right under this roof.

SARAH JANE. Go ahead, Nancy. It's your place to. You've knowed her the longest.

NANCY. Well—ef you think I ought—I will. I ain't no shirker. The way Blossy hangs on to him an' owns him is enough to turn my stomach. I never throwed myself at a man in my life.

SARAH JANE. Nor me nuther.

MRS. HOMANS. He'll get tired of her. They always do of women who make advances.

ANGIE. [*Coming back with the cakes in the silver dish*] You're jist sweet and good to set here so patient. [*Mary brings the cream and sugar*] Here's Mary with the trimmin's. An' here's the best cookies you ever put in your mouth. Try one Sarah Jane, even you couldn't do no better. [*Passing the cakes to each one*]

MARY. Cream and sugar, Mrs. Homans?

MRS. HOMANS. *Never* sugar.

MARY. How much sugar, Aunt Nancy?

NANCY. [*Her appetite not at all dulled by her anger*] You might give me three teaspoonsful today, seein' as it's a party. We do have to scrimp awful on sugar.

SARAH JANE. I'll help myself.

MARY. Sit down, Aunt Angie, you've been waiting on everybody else. How do you take your tea, dear?

ANGIE. [*Sitting in the small rocker at C.*] Oh, most any way, jist so it's tea, an' hot. I'm so happy over Abe havin' such a beautiful birthday, I don't care whether I have any tea or not.

NANCY. [*With her mouthful of cake*] This is tasty, I must say.

ABIGAIL. [*Coming back with her cup of tea and seating herself by the fire with a sigh of content*] Ain't this lovely, girls?

MARY. I must go back and see that Uncle Abe is taken care of. [*She goes into the dining room—closing the doors*]

ANGIE. [*Laughing*] Mary's got it too.

ABIGAIL. I told you the horn o' plenty would flow if we took Abe in, an' it ain't stopped yit. Grand, ain't it? [*There is an ominous silence*] What's the matter? What's took you all?

MRS. HOMANS. Nancy has a painful duty to perform.

NANCY. You've got such a trustin' nature, Angie, for all you're married—thet you've let Blossy pull the wool over your eyes somethin' terrible.

ANGIE. *Oh!*

SARAH JANE. She ain't fooled me. Not for a minute.

ABIGAIL. What are you talkin' about? Speak out, Nancy, for goodness sake.

NANCY. It's Blossy—the way she's goin' on with thet man.

ANGIE. *Oh!*

MRS. HOMANS. This is indelicate, but it *must* be done.

SARAH JANE. Go ahead, Nancy.

ABIGAIL. What on earth do you mean?

NANCY. Oh, you're simple-minded, Abigail. You never see nothin', or else you'd see that Blossy is carryin' on with Abe like—well, like no decent woman ever done.

ABIGAIL. What?

ANGIE. Oh, you've misunderstood her. Dear little Blossy. Why, she's as innocent as a— [*The ladies sniff emphatically*] Yes, she is. Oh, don't you see she's jist like a little purrin' white kitten that can't help it. She's got a lovin' heart thet will spill over. Why Abe loves everyone o' you alike.

ABIGAIL. O' course he does.

ANGIE. Like his own sisters.

NANCY. Well, there ain't no *sister* business in this. I've spoke. I've done my duty. I kin do no more.

ANGIE. An' I 'preciate it, Nancy. I know the noble spirit in which you done it. But I know Abe, too.

NANCY. Humph!

MRS. HOMANS. He's a MAN.

SARAH JANE. Every woman thinks her *own* man is safe.

MARY. [*Rushing in*] Aunt Blossy's going to sing for us. Isn't it lovely?

[*Abe enters with Elizabeth and Minerva on either side of him. He is followed closely by Granny and Blossy. They all talk at once, each trying to make Abe listen*]

ELIZABETH. You need a tobacco pouch the worst way. I'll jest whip you up one tomorrer. Red flannel makes a nice one.

MINERVA. You needn't trouble yourself, Elizabeth. I'm jest like chain lightnin' with my knittin' needles. I can turn one off in no time.

GRANNY. [*Pulling Abe's sleeve*] I've got some-
thin' fer you too, Abe.

ABE. Have yer?

MARY. [*Opening the piano*] Come on, Aunt Blossy.

BLOSSY. Ef I'm goin' to do it, Abe must escort me to the piano.

ABE. You couldn't ask anything I'd ruther do.

[*Abe offers his arm and escorts Blossy elaborately to the piano. The others sit in uncompromising disapproval*]

BLOSSY. [*After trying the stool*] Dear me, Abe, it's too low.

NANCY. Huh! Ef you can sing, I should think you could twirl a pianner stool.

BLOSSY. [*Lifting her eyes to Abe*] Not when there's a man to do it for me.

ABE. Willin' slave as I be. [*Clumsily turning the stool*]

ABIGAIL. [*Trying to make matters better*] Law, Abe, come set down by me and don't make so much fuss about that old stool.

BLOSSY. Don't go too far away, Abe. The song I'm goin' to sing must be sung to a man.

MRS. HOMANS. There you are!

ABE. [*Standing by the piano*] Go ahead. I won't budge.

[*The old piano tinkles out its thin cracked notes, and Blossy begins "Douglas, Tender and True," in a quavering voice—gazing at Abe. The atmosphere grows more painful for Angie as Blossy becomes more emotional and the others more shocked. At the end of the second verse Blossy sobs and falls forward on the keyboard with a crash.*]

NANCY. [*Rising*] I call this an indecent exhibition.

ELIZABETH. I used to sing that song as good as anybody. 'Tain't necessary to take on like thet.

SARAH JANE. It ain't, unless you're concealin' somethin' terrible painful.

ABE. [*Putting a kind hand on Blossy's shoulder*]
Go ahead, Blossy,—a good blubber'll do you good.

ANGIE. Be careful, Abe, dear.

ABE. Law, what fer? Ain't yer got no sympathy fer her feelin's?

BLOSSY. Thank you, thank you, dear friend. *You understand. [She takes Abe's hand—kisses it, and Mary leads her into the hall, closing the door]*

ABE. As sweet a woman as ever lived.

ELIZABETH. There *is* others.

NANCY. There is—but some folks don't seem to see it. [*She goes out banging the door*]

MRS. HOMANS. [*Rising like a goddess*] I don't mind being slighted myself at all—I'm thinking of others. [*She makes an impressive exit, followed by Abigail, Harriette and Hepsie. Granny is led off by Minerva followed by Elizabeth. They all talk violently as they go*]

SARAH JANE. I'd like to know where on earth you can look fer a decent behavin' man, ef not in a old ladies' home. [*She is the last to go and closes the door firmly*]

ANGIE. [*Sitting limply in a chair when she is alone with Abe*] Now you've done it, Abe.

ABE. What?

ANGIE. What on earth made you do it?

ABE. Do what?

ANGIE. Make a monkey of yourself over Blossy.

ABE. Monkey?

ANGIE. Lettin' them think you meant it.

ABE. Meant what?

ANGIE. That the sun rose an' set on her.

ABE. Law, mother, you don't mean to say you're *jealous*?

ANGIE. Don't be a plumb fool, Abe. 'Tain't me—it's the others. Can't you see the mischief you've done?

ABE. Well, I wouldn't a believed it! [*Pulling his waistcoat down, he stands straight enjoying his triumph*]

ANGIE. Law, father, the peacock's comin' out strong at last.

ABE. How kin I help it if women want to make fools o' theirselves over me?

ANGIE. It's their weakness, Abe—'tain't nothin' in you.

ABE. [*A little crestfallen draws a chair close to Angie*] Now, look a here, mother—I wouldn't hurt your feelin's fer the whole world. I'm goin' to tell you what's in them letters.

ANGIE. No you ain't. I don't care nothin' about Blossy's old letters.

ABE. Then what'n the land o' Goshen are you takin' on so fer?

ANGIE. Fer *you*. Your pop'larity's gone, Abe. I saw it comin'. They'll never fergive you.

ABE. They kin go to grass then. 'Twouldn't make no difference to me ef I never set eyes on another woman in the world but you—an' you know it.

ANGIE. Thet ain't the point. They've given us a home. We're here *together* through their goodness. If they was to regret it—

ABE. [*Rising with dignity*] They won't hev the chance. I'll go now. [*Going to the door*] There's a place waitin' fer me.

ANGIE. Abe—ef you set foot across thet door to leave—I go with you. Ef anybody goes to the poor farm, it's both of us— [*He turns slowly at the tone in her voice and goes back putting his arms out to her.*] I ain't scolding you, father. It's only 'cause I can't stand it to see 'em turn on you. [*She hides her face against him and gives way to her tears.*]

ABE. An' I've gone an' spoilt everything jest tryin' to do the right thing.

ANGIE. Don't grieve, father. Every big man goes through this sooner or later. Why, if Abe Lincoln hadn't died just when he did, he'd a bin hated some day sure.

ABE. Durn Blossy! It was all her fault. She—

BLOSSY. [*Coming in from the hall, followed by Captain Darby—a tall shambling man, wearing a grey wig which is very much over one eye. His clothes hang loosely on him and he speaks with a deep barking voice*] He's come. He changed his mind and come. [*Blossy is panting with her unbelievable joy.*]

ABE. God bless me ef it ain't the Cap'n! How be you, old feller? How be you?

DARBY. [*Taking Abe's outstretched hand*] Well, I swan! What you doin' here?

ANGIE. [*Shaking Darby's other hand*] I've heard more o' you than any man livin'. I'm Angie—Abe's wife. Howdy. Howdy. Look at Blossy blushin' like a school girl. I don't wonder. He's a *grand* man.

BLOSSY. He took me so by surprise. I went out into the hall and there he was openin' the front door. I most fell over.

ANGIE. I guess you did. My—my! Cap'n, this is an awful sweet woman. I've knowed her since we was girls.

DARBY. Wall—I bin tellin' her regular fer a quarter of a century er more thet she won't hev no cause to complain of my conduct ef she'll hev me.

ANGIE. I believe thet. [*With sudden inspiration*] Abe, take the Cap'n out round about, you know—you can't git no privacy fer a good chat in the house.

ABE. Come along, Cap'n.

ANGIE. Put your cap on, Abe. It's right nippy out.

DARBY. This house is hot enough to boil a lobster. [*Abe and the Captain go out arm in arm.*]

ANGIE. [*Drawing Blossy quickly down to a chair*] You sly puss! When's it goin' to be?

BLOSSY. What?

ANGIE. The weddin'. You can't keep thet grand man waitin' any longer.

BLOSSY. He does seem awful nice this time somehow. He'd kind a give up discouraged and it's made me look at it different.

ANGIE. Of course. Don't waste time, Blossy. Go and do it *now*—while you've got him here.

BLOSSY. What?

ANGIE. Go and take him by the arm and march down an' git your licence, be married tomorrer an' go back with him to the little house thet's been waitin' fer you so long.

BLOSSY. [*Bursting with happiness*] Angie! Do you mean it?

ANGIE. [*Fighting back her tears*] I never meant anything so much in my life.

BLOSSY. What's the matter, Angie? You seem all nervous and trembly like.

ANGIE. No, no. I'm jest thinkin' about the girls. They'll say he went back on you ef you don't take him to-day.

BLOSSY. Pooh!

ANGIE. Oh, yes, they will. They don't believe fer a minute you'll ever git him.

BLOSSY. Jealous cats! I'll show them. I only have to hold up my little finger to him.

ANGIE. Then hold it up plain, so's he kin see it. March right along—git your licence an' be married before dark.

BLOSSY. Oh, Angie—my heart's beatin' like it would jump out of my mouth.

ANGIE. [*Kissing Blossy on both cheeks*] Don't let them roses fade till he kisses 'em away. Trot along, now—and send Abe back to me. You'll make the prettiest bride that ever was. [*Angie puts Blossy out the hall door as Abigail opens the dining room doors and puffs in excitedly.*]

ABIGAIL. Angie—Angie! They're goin' to do an' awful thing. They're all riled up and won't listen to me.

[*Mrs. Homans strides in, followed by the others*]

MRS. HOMANS. Angie, we have a very painful duty to perform. I have been made spokesman and we have decided that your husband—or rather that men, are

out of place here and that— [*She stops the others with a magnificent gesture as they begin to talk*] I believe you asked me to do this. We regret it deeply, Angie, but we feel we've made a grave mistake, and that Abe ought not to stay—that he ought to go to the poor farm as he had expected.

NANCY. He'll hev to go.

ANGIE. You mean it all come about because—because I was foolish and got jealous of Blossy this afternoon?

NANCY. Jealous? You? Shucks!

ANGIE. Oh I could see how sorry fer me you all was—I knowed I was makin' a fool o' myself—but I couldn't help it.

MRS. HOMANS. That's absurd!

ANGIE. Women is that way. You're awful good to me an' you're so sorry fer me you want to punish Abe fer hurtin' me. I could see it. You're all so kind—but—but, I been talkin' to Abe and what do you suppose it all meant? He was jest eggin' Blossy on to git married. And—and—thet's what she's goin' to do. Her Cap'n's come fer her an' they've gone straight off to town to git the licence and git married right here.

MRS. HOMANS. Here?

[*They all look at each other as they grasp the idea*]

NANCY. That beats all.

ANGIE. And I won't never have no cause fer fear, becus the Cap'n's goin' to take her right home with him—an' you don't need to send Abe away to punish him. 'Cause none o' you would ever make me unhappy— [*They begin to be conscience stricken.*]

You're all too good friends fer thet. Oh, I appreciate what you're doin' fer me—more than I kin ever tell you. But—but—you don't need to do it—now—do you—with Blossy gone? Oh he loves you all so. You'll want him to stay now, won't you?

ABIGAIL. We need a man—the worst way.

ANGIE. You're so kind to me, girls; I jest want to ask you one thing more. Don't ever let Abe know this happened, or thet you ever contemplated askin' him to go. He'd—he's awful proud, you know, an' he'd—you'll jest go on treatin' him as if nothin' hed ever happened, won't you? He's so—

[*Abe opens the door but draws back quickly*]

NANCY. Abe!

ANGIE. [*Darting after him*] Come in, father. We're all waitin' to hear the news. Hev they gone fer the licence?

ABE. [*Looking doubtfully at the women*] Yes, they hev.

SARAH JANE. Well, it's about time.

MRS. HOMANS. I should say so.

ABE. What do you mean?

NANCY. Come in, Abe. You must be all tired out after all this fuss and feathers fer your birthday.

[*Angie drags Abe down into the center of the group of women. They surround him, enveloping him with homage and pouring out their contrition and their hungry love for their hero. Angie standing aside steals out of the room lest they see her tears of joy and gratitude and guess how nearly her heart was broken.*]

ACT III

SCENE I

SCENE I: *The sitting room.*

TIME: *Two months later, afternoon.*

AT CURTAIN: *Nancy, Mrs. Homans, Sarah Jane, Abigail enter in single file from the dining room and go nervously towards the hall door. Nancy carries a cup and spoon, Mrs. Homans a hot water jug, Sarah Jane a large bottle of liniment and a piece of red flannel, and Abigail a mustard plaster.*

NANCY. A good dose of catnip tea will set him up quicker'n anything. [*As she goes into the hall and up the stairs*]

MRS. HOMANS. I know his feet are cold. That's probably the whole trouble. My husband never could stand cold feet.

SARAH JANE. This liniment was the best thing fer pa. Always took the kinks out o' him pretty quick.

ABIGAIL. What he really needs is somethin' warm in the pit of his stomach. This mustard plaster'll jest soothe him all over. [*Abigail brings up the rear of the procession as they go up the stairs. John comes in from the hall carrying a small rocking chair which he has evidently mended. Mike follows him in with an armful of wood*]

MIKE. [*Putting the wood in the box*] A hell of a pile o' wood the old hens burns up. There won't be a tree left in the country when they git through.

Where's the old man this day or two? I ain't seen 'im a-tall—a-tall.

JOHN. [*Gesticulating to Mike.*] Upstairs, sick.

[*Angie comes in from the hall and seeing Mike slips behind the door to listen*]

MIKE. What? Sick is it? I don't wonder. He won't last long. Serve him right fer comin'! It's a damned shame, it is, fer any man that's got his two legs to go on, fer to set down here and leave these females take the life out of him. It's a shame, it is. [*He starts to the hall door—Angie steps in front of him. He turns to go the other way but she gets hold of his arm*]

ANGIE. Mike—Mike—wait. Go up and see Abe.

MIKE. [*Appealing to John*] What is it a-tall? Sure is she gone daft entirely?

ANGIE. [*Shouting in Mike's ear*] You're right. He needs a man. Will you go up and see him?

MIKE. No.

ANGIE. [*To John*] Run up. Shoo them all out and tell them Mike's comin'. [*John goes. Angie still clutches Mike*] He's awful lonely, Mike.

MIKE. Then fer God's sake why don't he git out?

ANGIE. Because I couldn't live without him.

MIKE. Sure a woman always drags a man down.

ANGIE. Wasn't there ever a woman you'd a done this fer, Mike?

MIKE. Never. Divil a woman ever got her claws in me.

ANGIE. Then you're so strong you're just what Abe needs. Tell him the house can't run without him. Tell him I'm ailin'. You understand?

MIKE. [*Dragging his cap off his head slowly*] You're the first I ever see with the brains you could put on your thumb nail. I been dispin' 'im—and it's damned sorry I am fer 'im. Think o' chokin' down his victuals with thirty of 'em starin' him in the face three times a day. God o' mighty! he done good to last this while.

JOHN. [*Coming back*] Coast's clear. Go on, Mike. Go on up.

ANGIE. Help him. Help him, Mike.

MIKE. It's the first trip ever I made to the second story roost o' this hen coop. [*He hobbles out and John closes the door laughing*]

ANGIE. It's no laughing matter, boy. His heart's broke an' I've got nothin' to mend it with.

JOHN [*Going to her with quick sympathy*] Oh, he'll be all right, Aunt Angie.

ANGIE. No he won't, boy. It's gone deep. When are you goin' away, dear?

JOHN. Next week.

ANGIE. Boston! Think of it! That's an awful big place. I've never bin there, but I've seen pictures. The street's full o' people you never seen—don't know 'em an' don't care. Just no neighbors or friendliness at all. Oh, if I could only speak words that would give you the wisdom to know. But you're beginnin' an' I'm endin'. And that's what life is, ain't it, the findin' out. You've got to come along the long road yourself. Let me tell you one thing, boy, just one. Put by a little as you go—if it's ever so little. Oh, the power that's in the pennies if they're only *yours*! Keep the rainy day ahead o' you, and the little house

that's goin' to be yours—safe an' tight, that no law nor debt kin take away. And when you're old—well—Put a little by—put a little by.

JOHN. I wish I had enough now to send you back—to your little house.

ANGIE. Thank you, dearie. We're all right. [*Seeing his cuff*] If you'd cut your cuffs off when they're frayed like that it makes 'em look like new.

MARY [*Coming in quickly from hall*] I ran away.

JOHN. Oh!

MARY. Mother's found out that I see John over here, and she's forbidden me to ever come again.

ANGIE. Oh—oh! Didn't she know it before?

MARY. No.

ANGIE. Then you can't blame your mother.

MARY. Yes, I do.

ANGIE. Not ef you put yourself in her place an' had a girl o' your own. No, you wouldn't. Would she, John? *You* don't want her to be sneakin' to see you, do you?

JOHN. No, I don't. But what are we going to do?

MARY. Mother and father are all wrong. Old people have such queer ideas. What does money matter? It's *John* I want—

ANGIE [*Smiling tolerantly at Mary*] Might as well tell the spring to stop bloomin'. If her father and mother are wrong, John, you must prove it. I'm goin' to leave you together jest a minute, but you'll have to talk fast becus somebody'll be a comin' in. I'll stand outside the door an' give the warnin'. [*Going out she closes the door.*]

MARY. I'm going to tell father what a wonderful

place you've got in Boston, and how you got it all yourself, and maybe he'll melt a tiny little bit. He isn't quite so bad as mother.

JOHN. After I'm gone your mother will let you come here again, and I'm going to write to Aunt Angie with letters inside for you.

MARY. Oh, I didn't think of that.

JOHN. Didn't you?

MARY. Of course I did—but I thought *you* never were going to. You were so long about it.

JOHN. You've got to come once more—any way—to say good-bye. Will you?

MARY. How can I?

JOHN. Will you?

MARY. I daren't.

JOHN. Will you?

MARY. Of course—the morning of the day you go.

JOHN. Monday. And you'll have to come terribly early.

ANGIE [*Opening the door*] Oh—oh—oh! He's bringin' him down. Mike's bringin' Abe down. Oh, ain't it wonderful? Oh, ain't it grand? Come in here—quick—quick—quick! Mike won't stay if he sees a woman. [*She scuttles them out into the dining room closing the door behind her as Abe and Mike come in from the hall. Abe is looking very seedy and Mike holds him by the arm.*]

MIKE. It's a drop o' liquor you're needin'. The next time I'm comin' in I'll be after bringin' it.

ABE [*With a groan*] Oh, I don't know as I could swaller it now. [*Starting to the fire.*]

MIKE. Don't be makin' fer the fire. Come away,

man. Come away. Set in a man's chair an' lean on your own spine—not on thim damned things. [*Throwing a cushion out of the chair and putting Abe into the chair.*]

ABE [*As he sits*] Go easy! Go easy! I ain't no young gazelle.

MIKE [*Thumping Abe on the back*] You're as good a man ase ever you was if you'd only think it. Keep a goin', man, keep a goin'.

ABE. I ain't got no reason to keep goin'. It's all been tuk out o' me.

MIKE. Huh? [*Bending down to Abe.*]

ABE [*Shouting with an effort*] I ain't got nothin' to go fer.

MIKE [*Remembering Angie's words*] Well—she says the house can't run widout you down here to run it. They need a man a drivin' 'em.

ABE. Oh, I'm sick to death a tryin' to fool myself with thinkin' that.

MIKE. You got a right to git— God! Here they come. [*Nancy hurries in from the hall followed by Mrs. Homans, Sarah Jane and Abigail all carrying the thing they went upstairs with. They file in to Abe chattering. Mike escapes.*]

MRS. HOMANS. Look at him sitting way off from the fire. You'll have a chill, man. Come right over here. [*She and Abigail take Abe by the arms—marching him back to the fire—putting him into the armchair. Sarah Jane and Nancy draw the chair closer to the fire.*]

ABIGAIL [*Getting the quilt which is on the sofa*]

We'll jest wrap this 'round his legs—case he does take a chill.

NANCY [*As Sarah Jane and Abigail wrap the quilt round Abe's legs*] Ef you'd a took this catnip tea you'd a bin well by this time. You jest swaller it down now an' no di-dos about it. [*Holding the cup to Abe's lips until he takes it, choking.*]

MRS. HOMANS. Now just hold this in your lap and keep your hands on it. [*Putting the water jug in Abe's lap.*]

ANGY [*Coming back from the dining room innocently*] Why, Abe, you down here? Ain't thet jest splendid!

NANCY. No, 'tain't. You let thet onery Mike come up an' hawl him down an' it may kill him.

SARAH JANE. You oughtn't to a done it, Angie.

MRS. HOMANS. Not without consulting me.

ABIGAIL. It's kind a dangerous bringin' him down.

ANGIE [*Going to Abe*] How do you feel, now, father?

ABE [*Groaning*] Oh, I'm awful sick, mother.

NANCY. Of course you are.

SARAH JANE. Anybody kin see thet.

ANGIE. Where do you feel bad, dearie?

ABE. Oh, all over, mother, all over.

ABIGAIL. Hadn't we better carry him right up again?

ALL. Yes, yes. [*They start for him.*]

ABE. No, siree—I'm here now I'm goin' to stay a spell.

SARAH JANE. A man's always a mule when he's ailin'.

ANGIE. Would you like to be real quiet awhile, Abe, and set here alone?

ABE. Lord, mother, I bin quiet so long I think a good loud noise would cure me.

ANGIE. I wish I could think o' somethin'.

NANCY. Catnip tea's the thing you ought to have.

MRS. HOMANS. Does your head ache, Abe?

ABE. Oh, awful bad!

MRS. HOMANS. Then it would be better to leave him alone awhile. [*She takes one of the handkerchiefs which she has made from Abe's pocket and ties it over his eyes.*]

SARAH JANE [*Pouring some liniment on her red flannel and wrapping it around his throat*] Your throat must be terrible sore—or ef it ain't this will stave it off. It blisters fine.

MRS. HOMANS. Come along now, all of you, and let him be quiet. He mustn't talk. [*She holds the door open and follows Nancy and Sarah Jane out.*]

ABIGAIL [*Wiping her eyes and touching Angie's arm*] It's awful sad, Angie. [*She tiptoes heavily out of the room, closing the door carefully. Angie drops into a chair, wringing her hands.*]

ABE [*Blindfolded and not certain who is in the room*] Mother! [*Angie is afraid to answer because of her unshed tears.*] Mother, are you there? *She goes to him, putting her hand on his knees.* Oh, mother, I'm afraid I'm goin' to die. There don't seem ter be nothin' else to do.

ANGIE. That's jest it. Ef you *had* somethin' to do you'd be all right. Would you like to play a game o' checkers, father?

ABE. Law, child, I know I'm goin' ter beat you before we begin.

ANGIE. I know—I know. Somethin' entertainin', that's what you want. But oh, Abe, dear, 'tain't very likely to happen. Couldn't you jest cheer yourself thinkin' 'bout all the good times you *have* hed?

ABE. Oh! I wore thet out long ago.

ANGIE. Couldn't you play this house is your boat and that I'm a furriner you got on board? A heathern Chinee or somethin'?

ABE. I don't see nothin' so terrible divertin' 'bout a heathern Chinee.

ANGIE. Well, there ain't nothin' so terrible divertin' 'bout nothin' less you help it along some. You kin git awful tired o' your own nose if you once let yourself go.

BLOSSY [*Opening the hall door and fluttering in, followed by her Captain*] Here we are! We've come to see you.

ANGIE. Blossy! [*Abe pushes the hankerchief up from his eyes and smiles.*] Blossy! An angel from Heaven couldn't be so welcome. [*They are folded in each other's arms with tender kisses—Blossy shakes hands with Abe.*] And Captain Darby, I'm just as glad to see you. Abe, Abe! ain't it wonderful? It's a miracle that they are here. [*Abe is speechless with delight as Blossy and the Captain shake hands with him. Blossy is looking very stylish in entirely new furbelows.*]

DARBY [*Looking curiously at Abe*] What's the matter with you? What you wrapped up like a mummy fer?

ABE. I'm awful sick.

DARBY. You don't look it.

BLOSSY. 'Tain't anything ketchin', is it? I wouldn't a brought Sam'l if—

ANGIE. No—no—'tain't at all. [*Drawing Blossy away*] Jest a little low in his spirits, thet's all.

DARBY. Mebbe you got growin' pains. Thet's the only thing thet ails me. I've tuk a new lease on life. [*Turning to exhibit his new suit.*]

BLOSSY [*Lowering her voice*] Don't Sam'l look spruce?

ANGIE. He's made over. I knowed you could do it.

BLOSSY. I found a way to keep his wig straight and it works just beautiful.

ANGY. How?

BLOSSY. Put a little glue on the crown of his head.

ANGIE [*Laughing*] An' he's as brushed an' tidy as a new pin. An' you're a shinin' like a star. My! Marriage is wonderful, ain't it?

BLOSSY. We're as happy as the day is long. You an' Abe has got to come and visit an' see my house.

ANGIE. Do you hear that, Abe?

DARBY. Oh I kin recommend her strong as a wife, an' so fer I ain't heard no complaints o' my own conduct.

ABE. You kin thank me fer her, Sam'l. I done it. She tuk my advice.

ANGIE [*Speaking low to Blossy*] Let's leave 'em together. He looks brighter a'ready. It's a man he needed. The girls will be awful jealous ef I keep Blossy down here any longer, Abe. [*Taking Blossy to the door.*]

BLOSSY. You don't mind ef I leave you a little while, do you, Sam'l? I must see the girls.

DARBY. Run along—run along. We kin spare you.

ANGIE. You take keer o' Abe, Cap'n. He's been needin' somethin' spicy like you the worst way. [*She goes out with Blossy.*]

DARBY [*After a pause—looking at Abe*] You got a headache?

ABE. No—I dunno as I hev.

DARBY. Well, you will hev with thet rag tied round. Take it off, man, take it off. You look like you was lashed to the mast. [*Darby throws the handkerchief to the floor.*]

ABE. Thet's jest what I feel like, an' lashed good an' tight.

DARBY. You ain't sick.

ABE. Well, I dunno. I'm sweatin' awful hard. Thet's a bad sign.

DARBY. Why wouldn't you sweat, bundled up like a papoose? Peel 'em off. Peel 'em off. [*Pulling the quilt he throws it into the middle of the room.*] An' hitch thet red rag off your neck. You ain't flaggin' no train. Lord, what's thet? A hot jug? Sweat? I should a thought you'd a flowed away by this time. [*Putting the jug on a chair*] Whew!—Starts me up jest to look at you. Who's been rollin' you up like this?

ABE. The gals done it.

DARBY. Hev you come to that! [*Laughing in loud derision*] Well, I never thought I'd see the day that Abe Rose'd let women make a molly-coddle of 'im.

ABE. You try livin' with thirty of 'em an' see if—

MIKE [*Looking in from the hall*] Whist! [*He comes in cautiously—nods to Darby and takes from under his coat a flask with a little whiskey in it*] It's the last drop, and a small one—but better'n nothin'.

ABE. You think I better, Sam'l?

DARBY. What? Git it down, man—git it down. [*Abe drains the flask, smacking his lips.*]

MIKE. That'll put blood instead o' water in his veins. It's a pity we ain't got a pep-mint drop fer 'im, so's the ladies won't smell it on him.

DARBY [*Laughing*] Do 'em good. [*Remembering to shout to Mike*] Do 'em good. It would do the old gals good to hev a drop themselves. [*The three chuckle at Darby's joke.*] I'd like to see 'em steppin' high. Git up, Abe, an' shake it down. Shake it down. [*Abe rises and shakes his legs with deep satisfaction.*] There ain't nothin' the matter with you.

MIKE [*With great pride in his cure*] That done the trick. A drop o' good liquor will do more fer a man's legs than all the doctors goin'.

DARBY. Certainly—certainly. [*Giving Abe a resounding slap on the back*] You're as good as ever now.

MIKE [*Digging Abe in the ribs from the other side*] What did I tell you! Where's your tobaccy? [*Abe motions to mantel.*]

DARBY. That's what. [*Mike gets Abe's pipe and tobacco jar from the mantel and Abe fills his pipe, generously offering some tobacco to the Captain.*] No, thank you. I'll stick to my own. [*He takes out pipe and pouch. The three men draw long breaths*

of comfort. A long pause as they smoke.]

ABE. A man gets awful low in his mind at times. Much obleeged, Mike. [*Shouting*] Much obleeged.

MIKE. Well, I'll be goin before the old hens gits in this time. [*He hobbles out through the hall.*]

ABE. Mike's in a lowly station, but he's a *man* and I treat 'im like a equal.

DARBY. What you need is a good spree, Abe.

ABE. Lord! It's poor pickin' fer spreein' round here.

DARBY. Thet's what I say. You must git out an' git at it. You heard Blossy talkin' 'bout a visit to us. We'll jest carry thet out. We'll send the two women on hum an' you an' me'll take a little trip over to the life savin' station an' hev a look at it fer old time's sake.

ABE. Could such a thing be done?

DARBY. Certainly it could. Why couldn't it? Ain't you got legs to git on to the railroad thet'll carry you! The same old life savin' station's still there—same old ocean poundin' away—an' plenty o' the boys thet will remember you. Done? We won't lose no time. Look a here. So's to avoid any arguin' or the women puttin' a spoke in the wheel, we'll jest go on ahead now an' catch the noon train over. We kin do it slick.

ABE. Lord! Lord! It sounds good. But could we?

DARBY. Could we? Ain't you got no liver left? What's the matter with you? You talk like you got one foot in the grave. Look a here. Git a pen an' write. Is they one? [*Abe goes to bookrack—gets*

lap desk and brings it to the table—opens it—sits, takes paper and envelope and pen.] Jest give orders for Angie to pack up your duds an' come with Blossy this evenin' to our house an' thet we're a goin' to the life savin' station to stay over night an' won't be hum till tomorrer. The boys'll give us a welcome an' a mess o' chowder thet'll warm your gizzard. Come along, git at it.

ABE. I ain't stayed away from Angie a night sence I give up my boat, but she's a awful sensible woman—she knows a man likes to git away once in a while.

DARBY. Well, I'm a beginnin' early with Blossy. It'll do 'er good. She'll 'preciate me all the more when I git back. [*Abe is scratching away laboriously with the pen.*] Make it short an' let's git out before they— Where's your hat? We kin slip out easy. Come on! Come on! Shet it up an' lick it.

ABE. [*Obeying instructions*] I'll jest put "Angie" on it an' put it right here in plain sight. I tell you, Sam'l, women's all right in their own way but when it comes to nothin' *but* women night an' day, it's kind a belittlin'. It don't keep a man up to the times like. Kind a takes away his ambition an'—an'— [*Going after his hat.*]

DARBY. An' makes a mother's boy o' him.

ABE. Lord, Sam'l, once I git fer enough down the road I'm a goin' to let out a yell thet'll raise the dead. Gol darn it, I'm goin' to raise hell—thet's what I'm a goin' ter do.

DARBY. You'll be made over when you git away.

ABE. [*His spirits falling again*] Yes, but I hev to come back—that's what you don't hev to do.

DARBY. All the more reason why you ought ter git off now.

ABE. You go on an' I'll meet you outside—down by the gate. I jest want to add a word to Angie.

DARBY. All right, old man, but you hurry up. [*Darby goes out and Abe goes back to the table—opening his letter he adds a postscript. Sealing the letter again he starts to the door—but hesitates, looks back at the letter, tempted to open it once more. There is a struggle of indecision and his rugged old face shows a tragic grief as he decides not to open the letter. He looks about the room saying good-bye to it and goes out brokenly but with determination. The slam of a door is heard. A moment of silence and Angie comes back into the room—swiftly and anxiously.*]

ANGIE. I heard the front door shut. Bless my soul—Sam'l's got Abe to go out fer a little walk. Ain't that wonderful? [*Mary and Blossy come in after Angie.*] Look a here, Blossy, he's shook his quilt an' jug an' jest got up an' walked. Sam'l done it. He needed a man. That's all he needed. Poor old Abe, my heart aches fer 'im.

BLOSSY. Heavens to Betsy! How it smells in here. Nasty old pipes. I do hate 'em so. I make Sam'l smoke in the barn.

ANGIE [*Folding the quilt*] I wouldn't care ef Abe set the house afire. I'm so glad to hev him smoke again. Set down, Blossy, it's awful nice to hev you back. I'll pull the sofie out so he kin lay on it facin' the fire when he comes back.

MARY. Well, I must go. Good-bye, Aunt Blossy. I'm so glad to see you.

BLOSSY. Good-bye, honey love.

ANGIE. Good-bye, baby.—Ef you see Uncle Abey out there, tell him not to stay too long for the first time out. [*She sees the letter.*] Is this yours, Mary? Why, it looks like Abe's handwriting. [*She reads the letter.*]

MARY [*After a pause*] What is it, Aunt Angie?

BLOSSY. What ails you?

ANGIE [*Speaking with great difficulty*] It's all right. Jest a note from Abe. Him an' the Cap'n's goin' over to the life savin' station tonight and is goin' to your house tomorrer an' expects you an' me to meet them there.

BLOSSY. Well, I never. Ain't they gettin' gay? But don't you mind, Angie. I tell you I ain't goin' back to that house tonight. You and me'll jest stay here till they come fer us. I'm going to tell Abigail I'm going to stay all night. [*Blossy goes out. Angie sits rigidly—Mary shuts the door and goes to her quickly.*]

MARY. What is it, Aunt Angie? Aren't you glad he went?

ANGIE. That ain't all. He says at the end he ain't comin' back, he can't stand it. Oh, Mary, where's he goin'? What's he goin' to do?

MARY. He's got to come back—we'll find him.

ANGIE. No, I ain't goin' to drag him back. Oh, Abe, I could tramp the roads with you. We've got nothin' left but love. Don't yer know it's the only thing worth savin'? It's all there is. It's all there is. [*She falls helplessly against Mary and gives up to her grief in deep dry sobs.*]

ACT III

SCENE II

SCENE: *The sitting room.*

TIME: *Two days later. Five o'clock in the morning.*

A heavy storm is raging with wind, rain, thunder and lightning.

AT CURTAIN: *Angie is seated at the window at back with a lighted candle on the sill. She has a shawl over her shoulders and is a little huddled miserable figure, staring out into the darkness.*

ABIGAIL [*Coming in from the hall*] Law, honey! You give me a turn. I thought I seen a spook fer sure. What you doin' down here? Are you skeered of the storm? [*She puts her lighted candle on the piano and draws her wrapper together over her nightgown.*] Awful bad, ain't it? I ain't seen a storm like this sence the year Jim broke his collar bone. I'm afraid the north chimbl'y's blowed over.

ANGIE. It would be awful for a body to be out in this.

ABIGAIL. Now, Angie, you know as well as you're settin' there he's made hisself comf'table somewheres.

ANGIE. No, I don't, and I'm awful worried about that letter thet came for Abe last night. We haven't hed a letter fer three years.

ABIGAIL. Now, you git to bed an' I'll git you a cup o' tea in two shakes of a lamb's tail. [*Taking her candle.*]

BLOSSY [*Running in in her nightgown*] Why didn't you tell a body you were comin' down, Abigail? I've spent the whole night pokin' my head under the clothes to keep from seein' the roof blow off, and pokin' it out again to see if it had. If Sam'l ever goes away from home again he needn't come back at all. I'll jest come here to live.

ABIGAIL. Don't be a simpleton, Blossy.

BLOSSY. Don't it make you mad, Angie, every time you think of them strollin' off? Are you ever goin' to forgive Abe?

ANGIE. The only thing I'm afraid of, is thet he'll come back too soon an' not git his visit out. I want him to stay long enough to hev a real good change. [*The outer door is heard—opened and slammed.*] He's come! He's come! Abe, Abe! Here I am. We're all down here waitin' fer you. Come in, Abe. [*Samuel Darby enters wet and sheepish, generally disheveled, his wig over one ear in the old way.*] Where's Abe?

DARBY. Ain't he here?

ANGIE. No.

DARBY. Then I don't know. He give me the slip.

ANGIE. When? Where?

ABIGAIL AND BLOSSY. How? Where'd he go?

DARBY. He give me the slip yisterday when we was takin' the train. I went on home, Blossy, an' expected to find you there.

BLOSSY [*With icy dignity*] You did? [*Angie goes to*

the sofa—she sits with her hands tightly clasped.]

DARBY. An' when you didn't come, I took the mornin' train over here.

BLOSSY. Sam'l Darby, you're a sight, after three months of my workin' to tidy you up. You march right upstairs.

DARBY. All right, Blossy, jest as you say. [*Blossy goes up the stairs.*]

ANGIE. Sam'l—didn't he send me no message—no nothin'?

DARBY [*In the doorway*] Nary a word—jest disappeared. [*He follows Blossy.*]

ABIGAIL [*Closing the hall door*] Tomfool folks! Now, Angie, don't listen to a word they've said—

ANGIE [*Rising and beginning to walk nervously*] Oh, I've thought of all they've said an' a million things more. I've seen him dead an' everything else.

ABIGAIL. No—no—he ain't.

ANGIE. I've got to find him—no matter what. I'll go an' pack his old bag with some clean things an' go to the poor farm an' wait.

ABIGAIL. Ef that'll give you peace o' mind, I'll hev Mike hitch up Dobbin' an' drive you over. [*Abigail goes out through the dining room. Angie starts to the hall door as John opens it.*]

ANGIE [*Clinging to him*] John, have you found him?

JOHN. No. He's not at the poor farm. I went last night and again this morning. I've asked everywhere in town and everybody I met on the road.

ANGIE. Hasn't he been there at all?

JOHN. Not yet.

ANGIE. Then I'm goin' there to wait fer him.

MARY. [*Coming from the hall*] What's the matter? Have you found Uncle Abe?

ANGIE. Not yet. I'm goin' to find him myself. [*Rushing by Mary and going up the stairs.*]

MARY. Poor Aunt Angie! When do you have to leave, John?

JOHN. I'm not going today.

MARY. What?

JOHN. I can't have the place. A letter came last night. The man's own son is going to take it.

MARY. Oh no! He promised you.

JOHN. I been thinking hard all night—since that letter came, and it's made things look different—like they really are.

MARY. What do you mean?

JOHN. I'm going to take you home and tell your father I want you. And that if you'll wait, some day he won't mind letting me have you. And tomorrow I'm going to Boston anyway and stay as long as my money lasts, and if I haven't got something by that time, I'll come back here and peg away and save some more and go again and keep on doing it till I get what I want, and, Jerusalem, I'm going to have it.

MARY [*Throwing her arms around John*] John, I never loved you so much before. But father won't listen.

JOHN. He's got to.

MARY. He won't.

JOHN. I'm going home with you and tell him this morning.

MARY. No, you mustn't. Yes, you must. But don't come with me now. Old Peter brought me over

in the carry-all and I have to get back before anybody is awake.

JOHN. Then I'll come pretty soon.

MARY. Yes. I'll go and help Aunt Angie. I'm selfish to think of myself. What if I had lost *you*, John? Oh dear—I don't know what Father will do to you—but come, won't you?

JOHN. Of course. [*They kiss each other with a long embrace. Mary goes. John blows out the light—raises the window shades—makes up the fire and goes out through the dining-room.*]

After a moment Abe peers through one of the windows and comes in from the hall. He is wet and disheveled and miserable and walks with great difficulty because of a stiff back. Going to the fire he takes off his shoes and coat and manages to lie down on the sofa drawing the quilt over his full length and covering his head. With a long sigh he goes to sleep. Abigail and John come in from the dining room.]

ABIGAIL. Slip up quiet and tell her to come an' eat a bit before she goes.

JOHN [*Seeing the figure on the couch*] Who's that?

ABIGAIL. Why it's Cap'n Sam'l Darby. Poor ol' feller! I reckon Blossy lambasted him so—he came down here for peace. [*Abe snores—they laugh*] Sam'l sure has got a queer snore. I reckon thet's one thing Blossy'll never cure him of. [*Mary and Angie enter from the hall. Angie wears her hat and shawl—carrying Abe's satchel.*]

MARY. I'm going to take Aunt Angie.

ANGIE [*Starting as she sees the figure on the couch*] Who's that?

ABIGAIL. Sam'l Darby.

ANGIE. Oh. Come on, Mary.

ABIGAIL. Not till you've had some breakfast.

ANGIE [*Picking up the satchel*] I couldn't eat. It would choke me. [*She starts to hall door—Abe snores—she stops.*] I'd give my life ef thet was Abe layin' there. Not thet I begrudge it to you, Sam'l. [*She starts again—as she gets to door Abe snores with a peculiar whistle. Angie stops instantly—recognizing the unmistakable sound. She drops the satchel and rushes back to the sofa—dropping on her knees beside it and letting her head fall against Abe. Abigail motions John and Mary out and tiptoes into the dining room.*]

ANGIE. Dear Lord in heaven, I thank you. I thank you. [*She rises, patting Abe and tucking the quilt about him.*] Go on sleepin', boy. How tired you are—an' cold too! [*Going to the fireplace she takes his coat from the chair and holds it against her breast.*] You've come back to me—you've come back. Mebbe we jest needed this little partin' to make us know how precious we was to each other. Mebbe we've jest been too happy. [*Stroking the coat*] Spots on it a'ready. Dear me—guess it's clam chowder! An' he never could stand it. Well—well—it don't matter. You're back. You're back. [*Going back to the sofa*] Your hair needs a good washin' an' combin' today.

ABE [*Half waking*] Mother!

ANGIE. Yes, father.

ABE. I thought I'd just come back an' see how you was gittin' along.

ANGIE [*Changing to resentful spunk*] Yes, I see you

did. But you needn't stay. There's a horse an' wagon outside, you kin go right over to the poor farm now.

ABE [*Reveling in the comfort of the sofa*] Well, there ain't no hurry, is there? This sofie feels kind a good. An' mother—I jest want you to know, thet my goin' away didn't hev nothin' to do with—

ANGIE [*Softening*] With me? I know—I know—You needn't say it, you don't even need to talk about it—you're back—thet's enough. I guess we both know what each other's been through. A letter came fer you yesterday. [*Taking one from her pocket*]

ABE. What is it? [*Sitting up and groaning with his pains*]

ANGIE. Got a stitch, Father?

ABE. Lord, no, I'm feelin' fine. Where's my glassess? You read it to me, Mother.

ANGIE [*Sitting beside him, she reads the letter.*]

Boston, Nov. 22nd.

Abraham Rose, Esq.,

"Dear Sir:

We beg to inform you that we have had an offer for your Tenaflly gold stock at ten dollars a share. Kindly inform us if you wish to sell. Yours truly,

BLAKE, HARKINS & Co."

ABE. What's that, I didn't git thet. Read it again, mother.

ANGIE. "Your Tenaflly gold stock at ten dollars a share." How many shares you got, Father?

ABE [*Dazed*] Eight hundred. Thet's ten cents, mother, not dollars.

ANGIE. No, 'tain't, nuther, it's dollars wrote out plain, look at it.

ABE [*Examining the letter—having found his glasses*] Gosh, so it is.

ANGIE. How much does that make?

ABE. Lemme git my pencil. [*Taking a stub of a pencil out of his waistcoat pocket*]

ANGIE [*Giving him the envelope*] Here, figure on this.

ABE [*Figuring laboriously*] Ten naughts is ten.

ANGIE. No, 'tain't, ten noughts is nought.

ABE. You hold on, now—I'm doin' this my own way. Ten eights is eighty—

ANGIE [*Counting on her fingers*] It couldn't be! It couldn't be nothin' like eight thousand dollars, could it?

ABE. O' course not. What do you think I am—a Creesos?

ANGIE. Give me the pencil.

ABE. Ef I had a longer pencil I could figure it quicker.

ANGIE [*Figuring on the envelope*] It works the same as it does on my fingers, but it couldn't be—it couldn't be. Nothin' like thet could come to us—peace and plenty an' no more trouble. It couldn't be. Father, it's the Lord.

ABE. Well, I dunno—I guess I done it myself. Bought them more'n twenty year ago. About time they was doin' suthin'.

ANGIE. Father, do you know what this means?

ABE. Yes, mother. It means we kin go home, buy it back, give it the two coats of paint it's been needin' an' live like *kings*.

ANGIE [*Throwing her arms around him*] Ain't it wonderful? Think of all the things we kin do for the girls. They kin all take turns comin' to visit us. [*Abe looks at her dubiously.*] Won't it be wonderful givin' instead o' receivin'?

ABE. We married one o' 'em off perhaps we kin stir up somethin' more. [*John and Mary come in from the hall.*] An' mother—I got a idea.

ANGIE [*Watching both John and Mary*] I guess we both have got the same one.

MARY. What's the matter?—Why are you staring so at John?

ANGIE. Somethin' too wonderful to believe. Uncle Abe will tell you all about it. [*John takes Abe by the arm and they go into the dining room*] Thet's what he's always wanted—to lean on a boy's strong arm.

MARY. You lean on mine, Aunt Angie.

ANGIE. I don't believe I'd know how, dearie, but I'd like to put your hand in John's an' see you start off together. An' if in the end he's still beside you—ef his hand still clings to yours—I'll ask nothin' more fer you. Your young eyes is lookin' forward—an' mine is lookin' back—but we both see the same thing. What is it, dearie? Love—love—love. That's what we both see.

[*She puts her arms tenderly about Mary as*

A LITTLE JOURNEY

A COMEDY

IN

THREE ACTS

THE ORIGINAL CAST
WHICH PLAYED AT
THE VANDERBILT THEATRE
NEW YORK
1918

JULIE RUTHERFORD	ESTELLE WINWOOD
JIM WEST	CYRIL KEIGHTLEY
MRS. WELCH	JOBYNA HOWLAND
MRS. BAY	MAY GAIYER
LILY	NANCY WINSTON
LEO STERN	PAUL BURNS
FRANK	VICTOR LASALLE
CHARLES	THEODORE WESTERMAN, JR.
SMITH	GEORGE MORTIMER
ANNIE	GILDA VERASI
ETHEL	VERA FULLER-MELLISH
KITTIE VAN DYCK	ELMA ROYTON
THE PORTER	RICHARD QUILTER
1ST CONDUCTOR	GEORGE HADDEN
2ND CONDUCTOR	JOHN ROBB

ACT I

TIME: *A few years ago—six o'clock—an afternoon in April.*

PLACE: *Grand Central Station—New York.*

The inside of a first-class sleeping car which is bound for the Pacific Coast.

AT CURTAIN: *The only occupants are Mrs. Bay and her granddaughter Lily. Mrs. Bay is a little old lady, with white hair and a pink and white smiling face, wearing a quaint grey gown and bonnet. Her granddaughter Lily is a pretty girl of eighteen becomingly but provincially dressed for travelling—and just now is opening a suitcase and searching for something as she takes out various toilet articles.*

MRS. BAY [*With the persistent voice of a deaf person*] I know it's there for I put it in myself. I must have it to put over my bonnet.

LILY. Why didn't you put it on top, Grandma? I can't find it.

MRS. BAY. Put it on what?

LILY [*Raising her voice a little*] Top—on top.

MRS. BAY. Over my bonnet—yes.

LILY [*Still louder*] Why didn't you— Oh— Here it is.

[*Lily gives Mrs. Bay a grey cotton veil which Mrs. Bay carefully puts over her bonnet.*

A Red Cap Porter coming in from L. end of car

carries a handsome travelling bag and umbrella and puts them in section at upper L. Mrs. Welch follows him into the car. She is a large woman, good looking in a common and flamboyant way—about forty-five years old, overdressed in the extreme height of the most extreme fashion. She carries a gold purse with vanity box and a great variety of trinkets which rattle noisily as she moves. After her enter Charles and Frank, two very young college boys who carry their own luggage, find their own section and proceed to make themselves comfortable—taking out caps to put on instead of their hats, unfolding newspapers, etc. Frank is quiet and shy with an appealing charm of manner. Charles is rather sure of himself and bears all the earmarks of a good-natured American boy with plenty of this world's goods.]

MRS. WELCH [*In a loud nasal voice*] Nine. Number nine mine is. I have the whole section.

RED CAP PORTER. Yas'm.

MRS. WELCH. Which end is the ladies' dressing room?

PORTER. Right there, m'am.

MRS. WELCH. [*Opening her purse*] Good Lord, it ought to be here. [*Seating herself with an air of ownership*] Now which way do we go?

RED CAP PORTER [*Waiting for his tip*] This way, lady.

MRS. WELCH. Oh Lord! I'll sit over here then. I can't ride backwards. Just leave my bag up on the seat. I have the whole section. [*Giving him his tip*]

RED CAP PORTER. Yas'm.

[*The porter turns to go as Jim West comes in from the Left. He is a tall lanky fellow dressed in loosely fitting clothes and a soft hat. He carries a large shabby suitcase. He is about thirty-eight and the thin face, brown and heavily lined, has strength, humor, and great kindness. He moves with a long, slow stride—and glancing about the car, throws his suitcase into the seat on lower side at R. of the center section.*]

JIM. Seven. Is this about it?

RED CAP PORTER. Yas sir—yas sir.

JIM. This car go all the way through to the coast?

RED CAP PORTER. Yas, sir. All the way through, sir.

[*The Porter goes out, and Jim kicking his suitcase under the seat, starts out as a slender young woman shabbily dressed, enters. She carries a baby, a heavy satchel and a package which falls as the satchel strikes the end of the seat.*]

ANNIE [*To the pullman porter who is helping her with her luggage*] The rest is out there.

PORTER. I'll git it. I'll git it. [*This porter is old and interested in his passengers. He shuffles out quickly.*]

JIM [*Picking up the package*] Allow me madam. What's your number?

ANNIE [*In a tired voice*] Eight—upper eight.

JIM [*Taking her satchel*] Here you are. Upper? That's bad business with the baby. Isn't it? We'll swop. You have my lower seven here—and I'll take yours.

ANNIE. Oh, no. I couldn't put you to that trouble, mister.

JIM. Give me your berth ticket. Here's mine. No, not that one. Here it is. [*Taking the right ticket from Annie*] Porter, we're making a trade. The lady will have this one.

PORTER [*Bringing in the rest of Annie's luggage*] What sir?

ANNIE. Oh no, I couldn't take it off you. I couldn't.

JIM. I prefer it up top. Better air. Great accommodation to *me*.

ANNIE. Oh my—is it? Do you hear that, baby? We don't have to climb up after all. Thank you, sir. [*The porter deposits the large shabby suitcase and a small satchel and starts to put the covered basket in the rack.*] Oh don't put that under there. I have to have it for the baby.

PORTER. You'll have to put *some* of it under to make room. You ain't got the whole section.

[*He follows Jim West out.*]

[*A dapper young Red Cap Porter brings a smart travelling bag and places it in the section in the center of the lower side.*]

Women's voices are heard and Kittie Van Dyke and Ethel Halstead come in from the left. Kittie is about thirty extremely smart—artificial—chic modern. She carries a box of violets and one of chocolates. Ethel is tall and languid—slow in speech and movement—wearing rather graceful clothes, soft and flowing in effect. She carries several books.]

KITTIE [*In high quick tones*] Where is it? Six she said, didn't she?

ETHEL [*Following slowly*] I don't know. Heavens, isn't it stuffy!

KITTIE. I wanted her to have the drawing room, but she wouldn't. She simply would *not*.

ETHEL. How could she? I dare say it was all she could possibly manage to pay for her ticket.

KITTIE. Yes, I know. [*Stopping where the porter is standing*] Is this six?

PORTER. Yes, miss.

KITTIE. I mean I wanted to blow her to it but she wouldn't have it.

ETHEL. Very sweet of you I'm sure.

[*Red Cap coughs slightly to remind the young lady of a possible tip.*]

KITTIE. Oh! [*Looking at Ethel*]

ETHEL. I'm sorry I haven't a cent. He's waiting.

KITTIE [*Looking at the porter*] Oh yes. Didn't the man give you anything?

RED CAP PORTER. No, miss.

KITTIE [*Winking at Ethel*] That's graceful of him. Very Alfredesque. [*She gives the porter some money. He goes out. Kittie sits.*] As I was saying, I'm so sorry for Julie I could die. It's appalling. She's kicked out. Literally kicked out.

ETHEL [*Standing languidly and condescendingly in the aisle*] Oh that's putting it rather—

KITTIE. No, it isn't. What else can you call it when her old selfish aunt refuses to let her live with her any longer, and that *pig* of an Alfred Bemis has *not* come across and asked her to marry him?

ETHEL. How could he? Julie hasn't a penny and Alfred about six thousand a year I suppose.

KITTIE. Six thousand a year with a real man would be—well—I'd take a chance on it. In fact I'd grab it.

ETHEL. It wouldn't pay for one third of your clothes. [*Finally deciding to sit opposite Kittie.*]

KITTIE. Oh slush—what do clothes mean after you've *got* a man?

ETHEL. How you rave dear! It's delightful—when you spend more money on clothes than any woman I know.

KITTIE [*Applying her lipstick skillfully*] Of course, because I've *got* it—and haven't got anything else. But I'd rather be *in love* than rich—any day.

ETHEL. Not Julie and Alfred.

KITTIE. Not *Alfred*. But let me tell you—he's broken Julie's heart.

ETHEL. Piffle! Julie's heart is too well regulated for that.

KITTIE. That's where we're all wrong about her. She's proud and game and pulling it off awfully well—but she's *killed*—simply *killed* and he's a *pig* and I *despise* him—and when you think what she's going to—it's *hell*. That's what it is. Nothing else. Why don't they come in? Alfred is making anæmic love to her outside,—I s'pose—keeping it up to the last. I'm going to get them in.

[*Kittie starts out as Julie Rutherford comes in followed by Alfred. Julie is beautiful, charming and exquisite, with an air at once appealing because of her loveliness and chilling because of the slight hauteur by which she rather holds herself aloof as something more precious than common mortals. Alfred is pale, thin, perfect in manner and dress, the ruthless bachelor—comfortable on his small income, allowing himself the luxury of loving but not of marrying.*]

KITTIE. Oh, here you are. I was just going out for you. Come and get settled. There's only a minute.

JULIE [*Coming to her section*] There's plenty of time.

ETHEL. I hate coming into the train. Porter, do tell us when it's time to get off. Why don't you open some windows?

PORTER. It will be cool enough when we get started, lady.

JULIE. Where am I? Here? [*Sitting in Ethel's place as Ethel rises.*]

KITTIE. The drawing room's taken, Julie. It's absurd for you not to have it.

JULIE. For goodness' sake, don't fuss, Kittie.

ETHEL. But it's awful—being mixed up with all kinds of people for four days.

[*Mrs. Welch rings her bell violently. They all turn to look at her.*]

MRS. WELCH. Porter, what time is it?

PORTER. Seventeen minutes past.

MRS. WELCH. Past what?

PORTER [*As he goes out at L.*] Past six.

MRS. WELCH. Oh! [*She sets her diamond wrist watch. Julie and her friends exchange amused glances.*]

ETHEL. Here are some books, Julie dear. One of them will amuse you—the other is an awful bore but everybody's reading it.

KITTIE. My little offering is chocolates. Mundane but most agreeable.

ETHEL. Here are some smelling-salts too. You

need those more than anything else in a stuffy train.

JULIE. Thanks. You act as if I were going steerage.

ETHEL. You might as well. A train's so much worse than a boat. You *can* get away from people a *little* on a boat.

JULIE. Let me take my violets out now. [*Opening the box and taking a deep breath of the fragrance*] Oh aren't they luscious!

ETHEL. They won't last long in this air.

[*The porter enters again carrying two huge traveling bags which he takes into the drawing room. A very portly gentleman by the name of Smith follows the Porter in. He carries a large roll of newspapers under his arm and puffs and blows as he wipes his face and the inside of his hat with his handkerchief which has a conspicuous colored border. Mr. Smith is about fifty and his fat puffy face is ill-natured and selfish. His clothes and his manners indicate that he has a great deal of money and very little else to recommend him.*]

MR. SMITH [*As he waddles through the aisle*] This is good business—train so far from the gates a man nearly gets left. Turn on that fan in there. It's hotter'n blazes.

[*He disappears into the drawing room.*]

KITTIE. That pig has it instead of you.

JULIE. Thank goodness he's going to be shut up in it. I hope he never comes out.

KITTIE. Isn't Julie looking lovely? I adore you when you're a little pale, dearest.

JULIE. Aren't you trying some new rouge, my love?

KITTIE [*Opening her small mirror*] Yes. Don't you think it's good?

ETHEL. It depends upon what you mean by *good*.

ALFRED [*Leaning over the back of Julie's seat*] If you want it to be as evident as possible I should say it was a great success.

KITTIE. You don't suppose for one minute I want it to look *natural* I hope?

JULIE. That *would* be stupid, wouldn't it? It suits you awfully Kittie dear. You look adorably disreputable. I don't know anyone who does it so well.

ETHEL. Oh I don't know—I think it's much more chic to be glaringly natural—well groomed and bravely plain. After all that's the last word in distinction.

KITTIE. Isn't it lucky you feel that way about it dearest?

MRS. WELCH [*To the Porter as he comes out of the drawing room*] Say, Porter, aren't we going to start on time?

PORTER. Yas'm. Yas'm.

MRS. WELCH. Well it don't look like it.

[*Leo Stern comes in from the R. followed by a Red Cap Porter who carries a travelling salesman's sample case. Leo himself carries a very large grip.*]

LEO [*To the train porter who has just come out from Mr. Smith's drawing room*] It's a wonder you wouldn't be outside to help a fellow with his stuff. Where's seven?

PORTER. Right there sir. I was just a comin' sir.

LEO. Excuse me, lady. [*Stopping at the seat*

where Annie is with the baby] Upper seven is about mine.

ANNIE. Certainly. I don't mean to take up all the room.

LEO [*Cheerfully*] All right—all right. Don't move. Just so I have a place to put my feet.

[*He takes off his hat and looks about the car smiling familiarly and showing a large gold tooth. His cheaply fashionable clothes smack of his trade and his small wiry body has a certain slang in its movements.*]

ETHEL. Do go to bed early Julie and get away from it all.

JULIE. You speak as if there were some danger of my sitting on somebody's knee before the evening's over.

KITTIE. I wish you would. It would do you good.

JULIE. Heavens! What's that?

[*Sniffing as Mrs. Welch sprinkles toilet water about liberally and wetting her handkerchief, spreads it on the back of her seat.*]

ETHEL. Isn't it dreadful?

[*They all turn to look at Mrs. Welch as she waves her hands in the air to cool and dry them.*]

JULIE. My violets might as well die right now.

ALFRED. It's time for us to get off.

KITTIE. It just kills me, Julie. I'd rather anything had happened than this.

JULIE. Good-bye Kittie dear. Good-bye, good-bye.

ETHEL. Do write soon and wire some place on the way, won't you? It's too awful to think of you—

JULIE. Oh don't Ethel, dear—*please*. You'd better get off now. The time's almost—

[*Ethel kisses Julie whose pride is fighting her emotion.*]

KITTIE. Go on Ethel. I'm going to bawl and I can't help it and I don't care. It's a beastly rotten sin that you're going.

[*Throwing her arms about Julie—she cries.*]

JULIE. Don't dear, it's awfully sweet of you—but don't—*please*.

[*Ethel goes out.*]

KITTIE. Damn it! It's all wrong—you know. If I were a *man* I'd snatch you up and *make* you stay. Good-bye—you're a peach and I love you. [*Kittie rushes out wiping her eyes and bumping into Jim as he comes back.*] Oh Lord—can't people *see* me! [*Jim smiles and goes on to his seat.*]

ALFRED [*Taking Julie's hands and sitting beside her*] This can't be the end for us, dearest.

JULIE. It is.

ALFRED. No, I won't give you up. I can't. I can't.

JULIE. Oh don't! It's all over.

ALFRED. Listen dearest. It isn't. Just because I've got the beastly luck to have no money *now* doesn't mean it will always—

JULIE. We've been saying these things so long.

ALFRED. It's money—only money. Nothing on earth would make me let you go if there—if I had enough to—to—

JULIE. To love me?

ALFRED. Enough for us to marry. You—you surely don't blame *me* for this separation—do you? Oh my dear girl—you know I adore you. It's only money that—

JULIE. It's *all* money of course. Why do we pretend that anything else has anything to do with *us*?

ALFRED. You know I love you. You know that—don't you? Are you trying to tell me that if I loved you more this wouldn't have happened?

JULIE. You know this couldn't have happened if we cared for each other more than anything else in the world.

ALFRED. But I do care for you more than for anything else in the world. You must believe me.

JULIE. More than for anything else except your own happiness.

ALFRED. *You* are my happiness.

JULIE. Oh no, your happiness is your comfort and your convenience. I would have been a *very* inconvenient incumbrance.

ALFRED. Take that back. Say you didn't mean it.

JULIE. I thought when I first knew I had to go—I was fool enough to think you would say "Stay and share what I have." And I would have done it Alfred—and been contented to be poor—with you—if you had loved. *If you had loved me.*

ALFRED. Don't. How can you say—

JULIE. I don't blame you. You can't help it. Other things come first. Good-bye—do go—you must.

ALFRED. How can I? You're being horribly cruel to me. It isn't true. And this isn't good-bye.

JULIE. Oh yes it is.

ALFRED. Kiss me.

JULIE. No.

ALFRED. *You must.*

[*"All Aboard"—is heard called outside.*]

JULIE. No, I can't. Go please.

ALFRED. Some day I'll have you. I won't give you up.

[*He kisses her hands and hurries out. The vestibule doors bang. Julie leans back covering her face—shaken by sobs which she is unable to control.*]

MRS. BAY. I'll be glad when we get through the river. It hurts my ears so. The concussion of air you know. It's a marvelous thing though—marvelous. I didn't think when I was your age I'd be riding right under a river in a railroad train. They're doing wonderful things these days. If they just don't go too far with their reckless ideas.

LILY. Don't talk so loud grandma.

MRS. BAY. What?

LILY. Nothing.

MRS. BAY. You jabber so I can't get half you say.

JIM [*Looking out the window on the side towards the audience—then rising and leaning over the seat to speak to Julie*] Your friends are trying to attract your attention out there.

JULIE. Oh, thank you. [*She turns to the window and raises her voice to speak to her friends outside.*] Yes—yes. No, I'm all right. Don't wait. Why don't you go? What? Yes.—What? Oh yes—I will. Good-bye—good-bye.

[*Mrs. Welch rises to see to whom Julie is speaking. Lily and Mrs. Bay also look out—Annie tries to see—rising with the baby. Jim goes on reading. The change seen through the windows at back shows that*

the train is starting. The bell in the drawing room rings violently.]

LEO [*To Annie in loud and friendly tones*] We're going now. Do you like to ride? Hello Kid! [*To the baby—dangling his watch before her.*] Coo—coo! Coo—coo! Are you a boy?

ANNIE. She's a girl.

LEO. All look alike to me.

[*The porter starts toward R. end as Mr. Smith opens the door of his room.*]

SMITH. What are you doing? Why don't you come when I ring? Come here and turn off this fan.

PORTER. Yas sir. Yas sir.

[*Smith goes in and the porter follows.*]

MRS. WELCH [*Going down the aisle to the dressing room—blandly to Lily*] Rather a disagreeable old party—isn't he?

LILY [*Timidly*] Yes.

MRS. BAY. What did the lady say?

LILY. Nothing.

MRS. WELCH. Is your grandmother deaf?

LILY. Yes, a little.

MRS. BAY [*Sweetly to Mrs. Welch*] I don't hear very well—the train makes such a noise.

[*Mrs. Welch nods her head violently and exits. Jim opens a newspaper and buries himself in it. Julie, wiping her tears opens her smelling salts.*]

CHARLES. I wonder when we can get some food?

FRANK. Dinner pretty soon I s'pose.

CHARLES [*Nudging Frank and looking at Julie*] There's a peach over there. Did you see the fellow saying good-bye to her? She feels pretty rocky.

FRANK. What do you know about it? I wish I didn't have to tell dad I flunked in two exams. He may not let me go back next year.

CHARLES. Gee—I wish I didn't have to go back. But the more I flunk the longer they'll keep on sending me. Look at Ikey and his gold tooth.

[*As Leo rises and yawns—stretching his arms and looking about the car, Julie tries to open her bag and hurts her finger.*]

LEO [*Going to Julie*] Allow me Lady.

JULIE. Oh, the porter will do it.

LEO. I'll have it open before you can tinkle for him. [*Opening the bag.*] No sooner said than done.

JULIE [*Frigidly*] Thank you.

LEO. Don't mention it. [*He strolls down the aisle to the boys.*] Smoker back this way—think?

CHARLES. No—the other way.

LEO. Much obliged. [*Turning and going the other way*]

CHARLES. The pleasure is mine. [*To Frank*] I bet he sells pants!

LEO [*Stumbling and falling into Jim's paper as he passes him*] Excuse me. Some spill.

[*The passengers all show they suddenly feel the pressure in their ears as the train goes into the tunnel.*]

LEO. [*To Annie*] Open your mouth and press your ears and it won't get you.

ANNIE. [*Looking about in distress—not understanding*] What's the matter?

JIM. Nothing. Nothing at all—sit still.

MRS. BAY. There! There! What did I tell you? I knew it would happen. It did before—that peculiar

sensation in the ears. Open your mouth dear, and it relieves it. My—my—just think where we are and what's on top of us! What would we do if it caved in?

CHARLES [*Making a swimming motion and lowering his voice to Frank*] Swim, Grandma—swim!

[*Two conductors come in from the left, stopping first for Leo's ticket.*]

LEO [*Looking in all his pockets*] Hold on. I got 'em, somewhere. Wouldn't that jar you! Where is the pesky thing? Oh, here you are. [*Finding his tickets*] Right here. Upper five. How about a lower? Couldn't you fix me up? They told me they didn't have anything but uppers. But that don't go with me. How about it?

2ND CONDUCTOR [*Laconically*] All taken.

LEO. Oh, come off. Is that straight?

2ND CONDUCTOR. That's what I said.

LEO. Well, fix me up, old man—if somebody don't show up.

[*The conductors go on to Annie. Leo goes out.*]

ANNIE [*To the conductor, as she gives him her ticket*] Will I be able to get this milk heated for the baby?

1ST CONDUCTOR. Speak to the porter about that.

ANNIE. Oh! Thank you. I don't have to change cars at all, do I?

1ST CONDUCTOR. This is a through sleeper.

ANNIE. Through?

1ST CONDUCTOR. You don't change at all.

ANNIE. That's what I thought.

1ST CONDUCTOR. Tickets, madam.

[*Julie rousing herself, opens her purse indifferently and then surprised, looks for her tickets.*]

JULIE [*Having risen and turned over everything in the two seats several times*] Why, that's funny. Where are they?

2ND CONDUCTOR. Perhaps in your bag, lady.

JULIE [*Opening her bag*] I surely didn't put them in it. No—not there. Why that's too queer. I had my tickets and my berth ticket and my trunk checks all in one of those little railroad envelopes, you know. They were all together.

1ST CONDUCTOR. Have you had them since you got on?

JULIE. Why no—not since I came on—but they were poked at the gate—and of course I put them right back in my purse, again. Or at least I *thought* I did.

1ST CONDUCTOR. You couldn't have got through the gates without them. Take another look.

2ND CONDUCTOR. Porter—help this lady look for her tickets.

[*The conductors go on to the other passengers and the Porter who has just come in from the L. with paper bags for the hats, puts the bags in a seat and goes to Julie.*]

1ST CONDUCTOR [*To Grandma*] Tickets please.

PORTER [*To Julie*] Lost your pocketbook, lady?

JULIE. No, my tickets. I haven't lost them but I can't find them. It's the queerest thing I ever—Look under the seats please.

PORTER. Yas'm.

[*He gets down on his knees and looks under the*

seats while Julie stands in the aisle watching him.]

MRS. BAY. Give him your tickets, Lily. Have you got both of them? This is a long trip for an old lady like me. I say this is a long trip. I made it very comfortably two months ago, going to visit my daughter, and I guess I can do it going home. What is it? [*As Lily nudges her to be quiet*] Are we on time? [*The conductors nod again.*] That's good. When I came East to visit my daughter— What is it, Lily? Do stop stepping on my feet.

PORTER [*Getting up from the floor*] No, mam— 'tain't here.

JULIE. Take the cushions out. Maybe it's fallen under.

[*The porter lifts the cushions out of the two seats. The conductors take the boys' tickets.*]

CHARLES. Fork out, Frankie. You've got 'em.

PORTER [*To Julie*] No. 'Tain't here.

JULIE. Why, they must be. Look down the aisle, then, under all the seats. Maybe I dropped it as I came in. It's a little railroad envelope you know. Look well in that dark narrow place at the end. [*Pointing to the end of the car*]

PORTER. Yas'm. Yas'm.

[*He gets down to look under Jim's seat.*

Jim watches Julie as she mechanically goes through the same process of moving all her things again. She opens the violet box and turns it over.]

JULIE. They must be here.

MRS. WELCH [*Giving the conductor her tickets as she comes back from the dressing room*] Lady lost her ticket?

1ST CONDUCTOR. Yes, madam.

MRS. WELCH. Awful careless. I always carry my purse right on my arm like this. And when I go through a crowd I just hug it up to me like that. Too bad!

CHARLES [*To Frank*] Crawl down the aisle and look for the lady's tickets, you lazy lubber you.

FRANK. You go. You're fresh. [*Charles goes to Julie.*]

CHARLES [*With irresistible good nature to which Julie responds*] Have you lost something?

JULIE. Yes, my tickets.

CHARLES. Have you looked in all your books and papers?

JULIE. Oh, I hadn't thought of that. [*Charles helps Julie turn the leaves of her books and shake out her newspapers.*] You're awfully good. It's the most mysterious thing. If they hadn't had to be poked at the gate I'd think I hadn't brought them. I don't see— They were all together—my ticket—my berth check and my trunk checks—in one of those little railroad envelopes, you know.

FRANK [*Going shyly to join Charles*] Where did you lose it?

JULIE. That's what I'm trying to find out.

CHARLES [*Digging Frank with his elbow*] That was a brilliant shot.

PORTER [*Getting to his feet again*] No'm. No ma'am. 'Tain't nowheres here.

JULIE. Why it must be. It couldn't disappear like that.

MRS. WELCH [*Going to Julie*] Where did you lose it?

JULIE. I'm sure I don't know.

MRS. WELCH. Have you been in the ladies' dressing room? Maybe you left it in there.

JULIE. No, I haven't.

MRS. WELCH. I left two valuable rings in there once and never did get them. One was a ruby—the most valuable ring I ever had, set in di'monds, you know. The other I didn't care so much for. I went right back the minute I missed them and they were gone. There was never any doubt in my mind who took them. [*Lowering her voice and glancing at the Porter*] It's in the blood. [*Touching Julie's arm confidentially*] I'd have him searched.

JULIE [*Very coldly*] My tickets would be of no value to him.

MRS. WELCH [*Not in the least suppressed*] Oh, I don't know. He could do *something* with them.

MRS. BAY. My goodness! What's the matter? Is there an accident?

LILY. No, no, Grandma. A lady has lost her tickets.

MRS. BAY. My stars! You be careful and take good care of ours. She must be a very careless young lady.

LILY. Be careful, Grandma.

1ST CONDUCTOR [*Going back to Julie*] Haven't you found it, Madam?

JULIE. Not yet.

1ST CONDUCTOR. I'll be back in a little while. [*The conductors go into the drawing room.*]

MRS. WELCH [*Looking very accusingly at the porter*] Are you sure you didn't find it, Porter?

PORTER. No ma'am. 'Tain't in this car. I knows that.

JULIE [*Giving the porter some money*] Thank you very much.

PORTER [*Bowing elaborately*] Thank you, Miss, thank you.

MRS. WELCH. What are you going to do about it?

JULIE. I'm sure I don't know.

ANNIE. Excuse me, Miss. [*Rising with the baby and going to Julie*] Maybe it's inside of your dress. That's where I always carry my money.

JULIE. Oh, no, I never have enough money to hide. [*Annie goes back to her seat.*]

FRANK. You didn't give it up just outside the car before you got on, did you?

JULIE. No, I don't think I did. I begin to wonder if I ever bought a ticket at all.

CHARLES [*Pulling Frank*] That will do for you.

MRS. BAY [*Unable to control her curiosity longer and moving to Julie's section*] Hasn't the lady found it yet?

MRS. WELCH. No—not yet.

MRS. BAY. What?

MRS. WELCH [*Who had seated herself in Julie's section with comfortable familiarity*] No, no. [*Shouting at Mrs. Welch*]

MRS. BAY. Was it her railroad ticket?

MRS. WELCH. Yes, her railroad ticket. [*Still louder*]

LILY [*Going after her grandmother*] Grandma, come back.

MRS. BAY [*With cheerful persistence*] Where was she going?

MRS. WELCH. I don't know.

LILY. Grandma, come and sit down. You'll fall over.

MRS. BAY. Let me alone, child. I like to know a little something that's going on. The lady can't find her ticket. [*To Julie*] Where did you lose it?

JULIE [*Laughing in spite of her irritation*] I wish I knew.

MRS. BAY. What?

LILY. Grandma, please come here.

MRS. BAY. People are so careless nowadays.

MRS. WELCH [*Rising and still shouting to Mrs. Bay*] Yes, I always carry everything right in my purse in my hand like this—tight.

MRS. BAY. When I travel I have a good deep pocket in my petticoat—like this. See? [*Lifting her dress skirt*]

LILY. Grandma!

MRS. BAY. And buttoned up tight too.

CHARLES [*To Frank*] She'll have to put up the money I suppose.

1ST CONDUCTOR [*Coming back to Julie*] Have you found it, Madam?

JULIE. Not yet. I can't understand. It's so strange.

2ND CONDUCTOR. You say you know you had it after you came on the train?

JULIE. No, I didn't say that. I'm not sure of any-

thing. I don't remember touching it—but I do know it was *poked* at the gate.

2ND CONDUCTOR. Yes, but can't you remember—

JULIE. They were all together you know—my ticket, my berth check and my trunk checks—all in one of those little railroad envelopes. They were *poked*—*punched* out there.

1ST CONDUCTOR. Yes but punching them out there won't do. I have to have a ticket or you'll have to pay your fare.

JULIE. Oh, but you *know* I had a ticket. The man at the gate let me in so after all what difference does it make.

2ND CONDUCTOR. Someone else may be riding on that ticket, lady.

JULIE. Oh no—how could anyone? I *had* it. You surely *believe* me, don't you?

1ST CONDUCTOR. If you had it, madam, when you got on the train, where is it now?

JULIE. That's what I don't *know*.

1ST CONDUCTOR. That's what we've *got* to know. We have to have the ticket, madam.

2ND CONDUCTOR. Too bad, lady.

JIM [*Rising and leaning over Julie's seat to speak to her*] Did one of your friends have the tickets at all?

JULIE. Why yes, of course, Mr. Bemis had them. He was taking charge of everything.

JIM. He probably didn't give them back to you.

JULIE. That's it. That's just exactly the way it was. [*Looking at the conductors*] You understand, don't you?

1ST CONDUCTOR I have to have your ticket, madam, or you'll have to pay your fare.

[*Jim goes back to his paper.*]

JULIE. I'll wire back at the next station and get somebody to *do* something.

1ST CONDUCTOR. Producing the ticket is the only thing that will do any good.

JULIE [*Not able to believe that her convenience is to be interfered with by law*] I'll wire Mr. Bemis and ask if he has my ticket—and he will wire back—some place further on. That's all that's necessary, surely.

CHARLES. Or you could tell him to have the ticket office telegraph you it was O.K. That would be official all right, wouldn't it?

1ST CONDUCTOR. All that takes time. You can pay your fare and it will be returned to you if the ticket is found. See?

JULIE. Oh but I—I'm afraid I couldn't do that.

2ND CONDUCTOR. Where was the ticket to, Lady?

JULIE. Greenville, Montana.

MRS. WELCH. Good Lord!

[*Jim looks up quickly.*]

1ST CONDUCTOR. The fare is— The fare is ninety-two fifty with the sleeper. You can redeem it. The money will be refunded to you at the office when you return the ticket.

JULIE. Oh, but—

1ST CONDUCTOR. That's the only thing I can do.

JULIE [*Opening her purse helplessly*] But I—I—I don't happen to have that—that amount with me. I—I can give you twenty-five dollars. That would

make it all right, wouldn't it. Till I get my ticket? I'll telegraph at the—

1ST CONDUCTOR. I'm sorry, Madam, but I can't let passengers ride on my train without their fare. That's what I'm here for.

JULIE. But I haven't enough money with me, don't you see?

MRS. WELCH. [*Calling from her seat*] Give him a check?

1ST CONDUCTOR. We don't take checks. You'll have to get off at the next stop.

JIM. Pardon me. To Greenville, Montana, you say you're going?

JULIE. Yes.

JIM. I'm going within a hundred miles or so of that myself. I'll be very glad to pay for this ticket and you can fix it up when you get there.

JULIE. Oh, I couldn't let you do that.

1ST CONDUCTOR. Then I'm sorry, Madam, but you'll have to get off at the next stop.

[*The conductors go out.*]

JULIE [*To Jim*] Thank you very, very much. You're extremely kind, but I couldn't.

JIM. I thought perhaps you'd like to go on with your journey now that you've started. I suppose you can get a train back to New York tonight.

JULIE. I suppose so. Thank you.

[*Jim goes back to his seat and Julie sits staring desperately before her, breathing quickly. The other passengers watch for a moment and then go on with their own affairs.*]

CHARLES. Damned shame for her to have to get off. She's a peacherino.

FRANK. The conductor couldn't help it. She ought to take that fellow's money.

MRS. WELCH [*Going back to Julie*] I must say I'm sorry for you. What are you going to do—get off?

JULIE. I suppose so.

MRS. WELCH. Shame—now that you've started. Live in New York?

JULIE. Yes.

MRS. WELCH. I do too. We're old New Yorkers now. But I go back to see Ma once a year. I'll always do *that*. It's nothing more than my duty. But *my*! It certainly is a dose. Nothing like New York, is there? I couldn't live any place else. When you're *in* right New York's the place. Haven't I seen you somewhere before?

JULIE. I don't think so.

MRS. WELCH. Seems to me I have. Did you ever come to the Queen of Hearts Bridge Club?

JULIE. No—I never did.

MRS. WELCH. I thought maybe that was it. I meet so many there. It's a swell club. You ought to join it. It's lively all right. You know what I mean—not *too* gay—but no dead ones. I tell my husband I'd rather be dead than behind the procession.

[*The Porter comes back with his paper bags,—going to Annie first.*]

ANNIE. What is it?

PORTER. Have your hat in a bag?

ANNIE. What?

MRS. WELCH [*Glancing at Annie*] I guess she hasn't travelled much.

PORTER. A bag for your hat to keep the dust off.

ANNIE. Oh, thank you.

[*The Porter takes Annie's hat from the rack and puts it into the bag.*]

MRS. WELCH. All kinds of people in this world, aren't there?

[*With the amused air of an experienced traveller.*]

JULIE. Yes, there seem to be.

PORTER. Have your hats in a bag, ladies?

[*Julie shakes her head.*]

MRS. WELCH. Take mine over there. Be careful how you put it in, too.

PORTER. Yas'm.

JULIE. How soon do we get to the next station?

PORTER. Almost ten minutes now, ma'am.

JULIE. Do you know when the first train goes back to New York?

PORTER. I couldn't say, Lady. I expects there'll be one along about midnight.

[*He goes to put Mrs. Welch's hat in a bag.*]

MRS. WELCH. It'll be awful waiting, won't it? You might go to a movie to kill time. That's what I'd do. Oh, that coon's jamming my hat in like a rag. *Here!* Be careful! I paid a hundred dollars for that hat.

[*She takes the hat away from the porter and puts it into the bag herself. The porter gives two bags to Lily and she and Mrs. Bay go through the process of putting their hats in.*]

MRS. BAY. More of their modern inventions. I approve of this one. It's very sensible. Don't you think we'd better eat our supper now?

LILY [*Glancing at the boys*] Not yet.

MRS. BAY. I think we had. I want to get to bed early and get settled for the night.

LILY [*Speaking in Mrs. Bay's ear*] Let's wait till the other people go into the dining car.

MRS. BAY. Why?

LILY. Oh, because.

MRS. BAY. Nonsense! I want my supper. Open the box.

LILY. I don't want to eat with those boys right there.

MRS. BAY. Why not?

LILY. Oh, I don't know. It *looks* so.

MRS. BAY. That's no reason. I don't want to get a headache. Open the box.

LILY. Oh, Grandma!

[*Lily takes the shoe-box and opens it reluctantly.*]

MRS. BAY. Don't get a spot on that good skirt of yours. Fried chicken's awfully greasy. [*Tucking her napkin under her chin.*] Chicken's dreadfully high in New York now—but Carrie can afford it so I thought I might just as well let her put it in. Here—we can put the egg shells in this bag the oranges are in. [*Taking two oranges out of a paper bag and dropping one—which rolls under the boys' seat opposite.*] Now look at that! Everything jiggles so.

LILY. Oh, Grandma!

[*Charles and Frank both stoop to get the orange—*

but it rolls further under the seat and Frank goes down on his knees to get it.]

CHARLES. What are you doing? Why don't you get it?

FRANK [*Feeling for it*] Must have been oiled. [*He gets lower down to look under the seat.*]

CHARLES. Are you *eating* it?

MRS. BAY. Dear, dear! That's too bad—to give the young man so much trouble.

[*Charles looks at Lily and they both laugh.*]

FRANK [*Rising with the orange—his sleeve pushed up and his cap on one ear*] Here you are.

MRS. BAY. You keep it. We have another one and that's plenty for us. They're very nice and juicy.

FRANK. No, thank you.

MRS. BAY. I wish you would.

LILY. Oh, Grandma! [*Turning shyly to Frank.*]
Thank you very much for getting it.

FRANK. Don't mention it.

[*He goes back to his seat.*]

MRS. BAY [*Eating her fried chicken with great relish and cracking an egg on the arm of the seat*]
What's the matter? Take your chicken, child. It's very nice.

[*Lily eats a piece of bread and butter—keeping her back to the boys. Julie again looks in her bag and her purse and shakes out the books and papers, occasionally wiping her eyes.*]

CHARLES. Me for food. Come on Frank.

FRANK. Are you blowing me to it?

CHARLES. I'll match you for it.

[*Charles follows Frank out with his hands on Frank's shoulders, pushing him along.*]

MRS. WELCH [*Powdering her nose elaborately, and going down the aisle to Julie*] Have you decided to get off?

JULIE. It seems to have been decided for me.

MRS. WELCH. It's a shame. Well, good-bye, good-bye.

[*Julie nods slightly and Mrs. Welch moves on stopping by Annie.*]

MRS. WELCH. My, what a little baby to travel with! I should think you'd be afraid to, aren't you?

ANNIE. You can when you have to.

MRS. WELCH. Why don't you put it in short clothes?

ANNIE. I don't just happen to have any.

MRS. WELCH. You ought to get some. Hello baby. See it look at me. Kind a' cute. Bye, bye, Cutie.

[*She goes out. Annie rocks the baby in her arms, singing softly.*]

PORTER [*Following the conductor in*] All right, Lady.

[*He takes Julie's bag out.*]

1ST CONDUCTOR. This is the station. We're pulling in now.

JULIE. Yes, I know. The porter has my bag.

CONDUCTOR. I'm extremely sorry, Madam—, but it's the only thing I can do.

LILY [*To her grandmother*] Oh, I think that's awful! She's going.

[*Julie rises and goes slowly to the door—Jim watches her. She turns suddenly and goes back to him.*]

JULIE. I—I think I *will* let you, if you—if you'll be so good.

JIM. You'll go on?

JULIE. I can't get off. I *can't*. If you'll be good enough to lend me the money, I shall be very much—

JIM. Of course.

PORTER [*Coming back*] This way out, Lady.

JIM. She's not getting off. Tell the conductor to come here.

PORTER. Them was his orders, sir. The lady is to get off.

JIM. Tell him to come here.

PORTER. We only stops a minute. You'll have to hurry, Lady.

JIM. You do as I tell you, will you? Tell that conductor to come here.

PORTER. Yas sir, yas sir.

[*He hurries out.*]

JULIE [*Calling*] Don't put my bag off. Oh, it's too dreadful. How can I thank you? You're very very kind to do this.

[*The train stops. There is the sound of newsboys calling outside.*]

JIM. Not at all. I just happened to have the money with me. Why shouldn't it be used? That's what it's for.

CONDUCTOR [*Hurrying in*] Madam, I told you you'd have to—

JIM. Hold on. This lady has decided to let me lend her the money. How much did you say the fare is?

CONDUCTOR. Ninety-two dollars and fifty cents.

JIM [*Counting the bills*] Twenty, forty, sixty, ninety-two and a half. There you are.

CONDUCTOR. Here's your receipt.

[*Giving the slip of paper to Julie—he goes out.*]

JULIE. You see it's—very important that I go on. I mean I—I simply had to. It's a—the circumstances are—I *have* to go on. I can't go back, and I don't know what I should have done, if you hadn't been so good. I never can thank you enough.

JIM. We all get caught in a snag once in a while. Somebody usually helps us out.

JULIE. If you'll give me your name and address, please. And this is mine. [*Taking a card from her purse*] Or at least it was. That was my New York address. I'll write the other.

JIM. I haven't got a card.

JULIE. Just put it on one of mine, then, please.

[*As he gives the card back to her*] Thank you. My brother will send the—the amount as—a—just as soon as possible—of course—and he will be extremely indebted to you for your kindness. [*Reading what he has written on the card*] “Jim West, High Forks, Montana.” Is that all that's necessary? Will a letter reach you with just that?

JIM. Oh yes, that'll get me. I have a sort of a—well, I don't know just what you would call it. A kind of a camp up in the mountains there.

JULIE. Isn't there a town—at all?

JIM. No—fifty miles from a town.

JULIE. But will a letter—

JIM. Oh yes, they throw the mail bag off to us.

JULIE. And it's only a camp?

JIM. We *call* it a camp. We've got about forty log houses and a store and a kind of a shed where the trains stop long enough for things to get off. And a good many things do get off—from pretty much all parts of the country. It's, you might say, as cosmopolitan a mixture of human beings as you can find put together anywhere. [*Slowly sitting opposite Julie.*]

JULIE. How strange! What sort of a place is it?

JIM. A place where a man can come when he's down and out and stay till he gets on his feet again, if he's willing to fall in with the law.

JULIE. The law? [*A little interested in spite of herself.*]

JIM. The law is work. Work and get your living out of the earth.

JULIE. How extraordinary!

JIM. Oh, no—it's ordinary enough. You don't happen to have stumbled on to it. We're all so busy digging in our own potato patches we don't see much of the other fellow's.

JULIE. And that's where we ought to stay—in our own.

JIM [*Trying to put her at ease, his kindness covering his shyness. He speaks with a whimsical smile and a wistful hesitancy.*] Don't you think it's—good—for us to be jerked out of them once in a while?

JULIE. No—I don't think that. Will you take this as security, please, for the—for the money? [*Taking a brooch from her dress.*]

JIM. What?

JULIE. There might be some delay. I mean my brother might not— There might be some slight delay in getting it back to you.

JIM. Of course.

JULIE. And I want you to take this as a sort of security.

JIM. What do you mean?

JULIE. Just that. It insures you against any possible loss—in case anything should go wrong.

JIM. I am insured.

JULIE. What?

JIM. I've got all the security I want.

JULIE. You haven't *any*. You must take—

JIM. You said you'd send the money as soon as you could—didn't you?

JULIE. Yes, but that's nothing after all. You don't know who I am or what might happen and this makes it safe.

JIM [*Taking the pin and looking at it*] The pin is worth a good deal more than the price of the ticket— isn't it?

JULIE. Of course.

JIM. And how do you know I'd give this up—once I got it?

JULIE. Because—you *would*.

JIM. How do you know?

JULIE. Just because—I *know*.

JIM. Then you must give me credit for as much good judgment as you evidently think you have yourself. It's my gamble. I'll wait. If I lose the money it's my own fault. [*Laying the pin on her book.*]

JULIE. Please take it.

JIM. No thank you. I want to see how good a guess I've made. I haven't been fooled many times. It would take all the fun out of it to have any sort of security.

JULIE. I'm afraid I don't see any fun in this situation.

JIM. Oh I—didn't exactly mean *that*.

JULIE. Just what—did—you mean then?

JIM. Well—to see a pesky little ninety-two fifty help a—somebody like you out of a—a—hole—was—I mean it was the biggest chance of doing something agreeable that I've had in a long long time.

JULIE. You're very good to put it that way. The "pesky little ninety-two fifty"—may not be very large to you—but it means a very great deal to me. It saved me from something hideous and humiliating, and I appreciate it more than I can possibly tell you.

JIM. Then I'm lucky. Ever been West?

JULIE. No.

JIM. You'll like it—if you don't go with your mind made up *not* to. But I'm afraid that's what you *have* done.

JULIE. No, I haven't, but I don't belong there.

JIM. We belong *everywhere*—don't we?

JULIE. Oh no, we don't. We all have our own places and can't be pulled up by the roots and live.

JIM. Don't you think we're all on one root and can live *any* place if we will?

JULIE. No, I don't.

JIM. I think we can.

JULIE. That's a beautiful theory but facts can't be changed.

JIM. The trouble is we accept too many things *as* facts. Most everything we're afraid of is only a boog-a-boo that can be changed with a good jerk.

JULIE. I don't like jerks.

JIM. Oh, they're fine. I *know* because I was pulled out of one thing and landed in the last place on earth I ever expected to be—and it's much bigger living than trotting along in the harness I was born in. There's nothing like a good hit in the head to make us see stars we didn't know were in the firmament.

JULIE. I don't agree with anything you say—but I wish I did.

JIM [*After a short quick laugh*] We never agree to anything till we've lived through it, then we *know*.

JULIE. When we know what we want and why we want it, and what we can't live without, what's the use of trying to live through any—

ANNIE [*Going to Julie—having put the baby on the seat*] Excuse me, Miss—but the baby's asleep and it's the only chanct I've got to get anything to eat. I haven't had anything today but an apple. If you wouldn't mind just keeping your eye on her in case she rolls off.

JULIE. Where are you going? [*Very dubiously.*]

ANNIE. In the eatin' car to get somethin' to eat.

JULIE. Oh—*will* it roll off?

ANNIE. No, Miss, I don't think so. I think she'll stay asleep.

JULIE. What would I do if she did?

ANNIE. Just pick her up again.

JULIE. But aren't you afraid to leave it?

ANNIE. Not if you watch 'er, Miss. If you'd be so good as to. I beg your pardon for askin' you, but I felt I had to have a little bite of somethin' to—[*Putting her hand to her head faintly.*]

JULIE. Yes, of course. I'll do the best I can.

ANNIE. Thank you, Miss—thank you. You're very kind. I won't be any longer than I can help and I'm going to get this heated if I can. It gives her the colic to take it cold.

[*Holding the bottle of milk, Annie goes out. Julie rises and looks at the baby—hesitates, then taking her book goes to sit in Annie's place. Jim from behind his paper watches her with the keenest amusement and interest.*]

The baby begins to whimper a little, rapidly increases till it howls lustily. Julie in consternation stands up.]

JULIE. Oh, what's the matter? Don't, baby! There—there! [*Patting it timidly*] Don't cry. There, there! Oh goodness! What *is* the matter? What shall I do? Will you go and get the mother?

JIM. Too bad to haul her back before she *gets anything to eat.* [*The baby gives a louder yell.*]

JULIE. It's choking to death! What shall I do?

JIM. Take it up.

JULIE. *Must I?* [*The baby shrieks and Julie snatches it up in desperation.*] Oh, baby, please don't. What *is* the matter? Your mother's coming back in a few minutes. Oh, please don't cry so. What *shall* I do?

JIM. You're doing pretty well seems to me.

JULIE. But I may be doing the wrong thing.

JIM. The longer you stick it out the more the mother can eat.

JULIE. How can anything so little make so much noise? There! There! You poor little thing. That's better. Why you're actually sort of pretty. What tiny hands! Oh, don't cry again. There! That's right! You must be good and wait for mother. That's a good baby. [*Wiping the baby's eyes with her own handkerchief.*] Do you think I could put her down again now?

JIM. I think you'd be taking big chances. She seems to like this better.

JULIE [*Sitting stiffly, afraid of disturbing the young person*] Yes, she seems to have settled down for the evening. Nothing like taking things for granted, baby. You look extremely comfortable but *I'm* not. If you wouldn't mind handing me my book, I think I could read. [*Jim gives Julie the book. The baby whimpers.*] Oh well, never mind, I won't.

[*Jim laughs and Julie laughs with him helplessly.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

PLACE. *Same as Act I.*

TIME: *Three days later—early evening.*

AT CURTAIN: *Mrs. Welch's section is partially made up, but the curtains not hung. Leo is entertaining Annie and Mrs. Welch is with Mrs. Bay. There is a general air of intimacy and friendliness. The other passengers are not in the car.*

MRS. WELCH [*Shouting to Mrs. Bay and elaborately polishing her fingernails*] She's eating dinner with him now and I dare say he's paying the bill. I know why they went in so early—so there wouldn't be any of *us* there. You can't fool *me*. Any woman that will pick up a man on a train and let him pay for her ticket and then carry on with him like *this* is—well—you can't fool *me*.

MRS. BAY. You don't think she's—

MRS. WELCH. Oh! I wouldn't be surprised. When you live in New York you're not surprised at anything.

MRS. BAY. I won't let Lily talk to her any more.

MRS. WELCH. Oh, I don't *say* anything.

MRS. BAY. The world is full of strange people. I'll be glad to get home where I know everybody. Our church circle is the salt of the earth—the backbone of the nation. I don't know any such people *any* place. You know the kind I mean.

MRS. WELCH. Lord, yes, I know 'em.

MRS. BAY. What?

MRS. WELCH. Nothing.

MRS. BAY. Dear me—Lily's out on the back platform with those two boys. I think I'd better go after her.

MRS. WELCH. Oh no, let her alone. She's all right. Let her have a little fun.

MRS. BAY. They seem like very nice boys but I don't really know anything about them.

MRS. WELCH. *She* does. I bet she knows what kind of socks they like by this time.

MRS. BAY. Lily was never bold.

[Lily bursts into the car with a scream—laughing and out of breath—Charles close after her and trying to snatch the locket which she wears on a ribbon around her neck. Grandma's back is turned to them.]

LILY. I won't—I won't—I *won't*! You shan't see it!

CHARLES. Then I know it's some guy's picture or you wouldn't care.

FRANK. Oh, let up, Charles—you're too fresh. She doesn't want you to see it.

LILY *[Throwing herself into a seat]* No I don't! Now please stop. Oh my hair! Goodness, I must be a sight.

CHARLES. You *are*—something terrible. It's all down your back.

LILY. Oh sakes!

FRANK. It is not. It's all right. Shut up, Charles.

LILY. If Grandma sees it she'll have a fit.

CHARLES. You're losing your hairpins. [*Taking one out of Lily's hair*]

MRS. BAY [*Contentedly to Mrs. Welch—not having heard the young people come in*] Lily's just like I was when I was a girl—very quiet and lady-like and makes the boys keep their distance.

MRS. WELCH [*Winking at Frank who looks at her*] You bet—just the right distance, and she seems to keep some further than others.

MRS. BAY. What?

MRS. WELCH. Nothing. Nothing.

LILY. Now, go away and behave. Oh, I must give this book back to that young lady. She loaned it to me and said "I'm sure you'll find it extremely amusing," but goodness I didn't see one funny thing in it. Not one. She and the man must be eating dinner. They act like real sure enough friends now. She laughs right out loud when he talks to her.

CHARLES. She ought to laugh at his jokes when he staked her to the ticket.

LILY. Isn't it funny. I keep wondering about her.

CHARLES. I've got a thirst. Want some water?

LILY. No, thank you. [*Charles goes out.*] Only one day more. I'll be home this time tomorrow night.

FRANK. Four days is a pretty long trip? Isn't it?

LILY. Y-e-s.

FRANK. This is the shortest it's ever been to me.

LILY. Is it? Why? [*With shy excitement*]

FRANK. Oh—I don't know. Kind—a—it's sort of—it helps—along some to have a girl to talk to.

LILY. Oh—*any* girl?

FRANK. N-o—not *any* girl. A girl. YOU.

LILY [*Trying to cover her embarrassment by laughing*] Oh!

FRANK. I—I—may be—I might have to go through your town this summer—sometime. I—might stop and say hello.

LILY. Oh—do. You—you must stay to supper if you *do*.

FRANK. Oh, I couldn't do that—thank you—but—

LILY. Yes you could, too. The idea! Of course you could. You'd have to. You couldn't go through our town without coming to a *meal*. Mother would be—she'd be so glad to see you.

FRANK. How about you?

LILY. What?

FRANK. Would you be glad?

LILY. Yes I would. Of course, I would.

FRANK. I don't know many girls. I don't know any as well as I know you.

LILY. Oh my! Don't you?

FRANK. I suppose you know a lot of fellows.

LILY. W-e-l-l *some*, not such an awful lot. Not so awfully *well*. I mean—there isn't anybody in *particular* that I know so awfully well—you know. I mean—*You* know what I mean.

FRANK. How about the fellow in that locket?

LILY. It isn't.

FRANK. Oh come.

LILY. No, it isn't.

FRANK. How can you expect me to believe that?

LILY. Don't you tell Charles and I'll show it to you. Promise?

FRANK. Sure.

LILY [*Opening the locket*] It's the very dearest person in the whole world. See—it's mother.

FRANK. Oh—she's a peach.

LILY. Now do you believe me?

[*Closing the locket.*]

FRANK. I guess I've got to. [*Gazing at her hands.*] Awfully little hands you've got.

LILY [*Hiding her hands*] Oh no, they're not. They're not. Why I—I think I have *very* large hands.

FRANK. Let's see.

LILY. No.

FRANK. Go on—please. Let me see.

[*There is a slight struggle as Frank tries to get her hands.*]

LILY. Oh don't. He's coming back.

[*Charles comes back. Lily and Frank relapse into dignified silence for a moment. Then the three burst into laughter.*]

LEO [*Strolling down the aisle to Mrs. Welch*] Here's a Kansas City paper. Like to have it?

MRS. WELCH. Do I look it?

LEO. Ouch! [*Slapping his own cheek.*] Have a paper? [*Going on to the boys.*]

CHARLES. No thanks.

LEO. You fellows going home from school, ain't you?

LILY. Why, how could you tell?

LEO. Oh, in my business you're on. I can hang 'em on the right peg every time. These young fellows go down East to school to spend a little of Father's money, and the clothes and the hair get a new cut.

You didn't buy them pants in Squeedunk. You bet your life you didn't. [*Charles and Frank laugh and Leo joins in.*] Think you're the real thing now, don't you? Well, I came from the village myself, but I've never been back. Main Street wasn't wide enough for me.

MRS. WELCH [*Rising and stretching her long arms*] I'm so sick of this cubby-hole I don't know what to do. I'll be glad when I can sleep in a real bed again.

LEO [*Genially, as he comes towards Mrs. Welch*] I bet you like a good big brass one.

MRS. WELCH [*With a very grand air*] Not at all. I got rid of all my brass beds ten years ago.

PORTER [*Coming in and stopping at Annie's seat*] How's the baby this evenin'?

ANNIE. Oh, she's all right. Would you get a cup of water for her?

PORTER [*Taking the cup Annie holds up*] I sure would. I sure would do that for this young Lady. She's the best traveller I ever see. Hello honey.

MRS. WELCH. Porter, make my bed up first to-night. I don't propose to wait forever like I did last night.

PORTER. Can't do it all at onct, lady.

MRS. WELCH. No, but you can do mine *first*. Don't forget.

PORTER. Yas'm.

SMITH [*Coming out of the drawing room*] Porter, make my bed up first tonight before you start out here. I didn't pay for this infernal box of a drawing room to be kept waiting till you'd made up everything else on the train. Do you understand?

[*He struts down the aisle and out.*]

PORTER. Yas, sir. Yas, sir.

[*Going out after Smith*]

MRS. WELCH. Um! Nothing like thinking of *yourself*.

LEO [*To the boys*] If you want to see the golden rule shining at its brightest, watch the travelling pub. Not safety first—but *me* first.

[*Julie comes in from the diner. Leo starts towards her. The motion of the train knocks her towards Leo.*]

LEO [*Catching Julie*] Going some! Pardon me. Did I grab you too tight? I thought you was going over.

JULIE [*Drawing her arm away*] It's all right. Thank you.

[*Julie doesn't look at Leo as she sits but he stands by her contentedly.*]

LEO. I've got a good book down there. One that'll keep you guessing. Like to have it?

JULIE. Thank you. I have books.

LEO. I never read except when I'm on the train and then I like something doing. Want your window down? Allow me.

[*Julie starts and puts her hand over one eye quickly.*] Got a cinder in your eye?

JULIE. It's nothing.

LEO. Must be *something* to make you jump like that. Hurts like the mischief, don't it?

JULIE. It will be all right in a minute.

LEO. No it won't. Oh, that blowing the other side of your nose don't do no good. The only way to get a cinder out is to *take* it out. I'll do it for you.

JULIE. Oh no.

LEO. Very glad to.

JULIE. Oh no—no. It will be all—

LEO. No it won't. I know the trick. You mustn't monkey with a cinder. Quick action is the thing. Just hold your head back and keep still a minute.

JULIE. No, I don't want—

LEO. I won't hurt you. Give me your hankie. Now, I just turn the lid back like that and—Hold still—just a—Hold still—There you are. No wonder you squirmed. That was a whale of a fellow. [*Showing the cinder to Jim.*] How's that for size, to get in a lady's eye?

[*Jim has come in from the dining car in time to see the cinder extracted, and now as Julie looks at him they laugh in a very friendly and understanding way.*]

JULIE. I'm very much obliged, I'm sure.

LEO. Don't mention it. Don't rub it now. [*To Jim*] Had your dinner?

JIM. Yes.

LEO. Pretty bum layout. Gettin' to the bottom. Try the chicken?

JIM. I know better.

LEO. I got stung for a dollar twenty-five for the toughest old bird in captivity last night. I'll be damned glad when I get out of this. That's the worst thing about my business—sittin' still in a train—no action. Can't sell no goods—just have to wait. It's hell.

JIM. Why do you do it?

LEO. Why do I *do* it? So's I can live when I get back to Broadway. See? I'm going to take a chance on a little food now myself. You're not the only one who's playing a twosome. I've got a date myself in the diner.

[*Winking and smiling intimately at Jim he goes out.*]

JIM. I hope that first aid to the injured was a success.

JULIE. I think it must have been.

JIM. But you didn't look grateful.

JULIE. I wasn't. Oh, you were going to tell me—

JIM. Wait till these people go out to dinner.

JULIE. Isn't it a bore!

[*Mrs. Welch, having heard this conversation, raises her eyebrows and deliberately marches down to Julie.*]

MRS. WELCH. Poor food, isn't it?

JULIE. Pardon me?

MRS. WELCH. I say it's awful poor food. Aren't you getting sick of it?

JULIE. I suppose we can't expect anything else.

MRS. WELCH. Oh I don't know. Lord knows we pay enough for it. That's one thing I'm awfully fussy about. [*Sitting opposite Julie*] I pay my cook eighty dollars and I never go near the kitchen. That's one thing my husband *will* have—good food. Prices are fierce though—aren't they?

JULIE. I believe so.

MRS. WELCH. But I say to Harry "Well, we've *got* to live and you might as well be dead as have nothing

you like to eat." We go out a lot too. When I entertain friends I like to take them down-town, don't you know. I think they like it better. What's your favorite place?

JULIE. Oh—they're all dull enough.

MRS. WELCH. Oh I don't know. Not if you aren't a dead one yourself. You have to know the ropes of course and where *to* go, and that's one thing I *do* know—I know New York and what's going on in it. Here's this old lady over here talking about *her* town—*her* church—*her* friends—thinking the sun rises and sets right there. Funny ain't it? Just laughable when you *do* live in the *real* world.

JULIE [*Taking up her book*] Yes, I suppose so.

MRS. WELCH. You've got real friendly with the fellow who loaned you the money by this time—haven't you?

JULIE. I beg your pardon?

MRS. WELCH. Why not? I'm broad minded. I believe in taking all that comes your way—within reason.

JULIE. I really don't know what you mean.

MRS. WELCH. Oh, I don't mean anything. I think you were darned sensible to do it and of course you have to be friendly to him since you *did* do it. It's caused some talk—but then that don't matter to *me*. I'm not so straight-laced.

JULIE. Talk? How absolutely disgusting.

MRS. WELCH. Well you know you can't keep people from having their opinions and saying what they please. Nobody's got a little wire fence around 'em in *this* day and age. It don't go. I'm going to eat.

[*Speaking to Jim as she passes him*] You went in pretty *early* tonight, didn't you?

[*She smiles at Jim and goes out slowly—humming insinuatingly as she goes.*]

JIM [*Rising to get Annie's suitcase which she is struggling to lift*] Mustn't let our youngest passenger fall. She wouldn't like it.

ANNIE. I guess not. If anything happened to her— Thank you. If anything happened to her I might as well never try to get to Bill at all.

JIM. I guess Bill would be pretty glad to see you anyway—wouldn't he?

ANNIE [*With a long hopeless sigh*] I wouldn't risk it without *her*.

JIM. Is there anything I can do to make things easier for you? Because if there is—speak up. Don't be foolish about thinking I'm a stranger or anything of that kind. Understand?

ANNIE. You don't seem like a stranger somehow.

JIM. I'm not. There's no such animal. *Is* there something I can do?

ANNIE. No—there ain't. There's nothin' nobody can do. I've just got to get to Bill. [*Touching her chest with a tired hand*] Somehow I don't feel as if I was ever goin' to, though.

JIM. Train's ripping along in fine shape, putting you nearer every minute.

ANNIE. Yes, but that ain't it. I just have a feelin'— I want to speak to that lady. [*She crosses to Julie—taking the baby with her.*] May I speak to you a minute?

[*Jim goes out.*]

JULIE [*Moving some things on the seat opposite her*]
Sit down.

ANNIE. Thank you. I just want to thank you for mindin' her every day while I went out to eat.

JULIE. Oh, please don't.

ANNIE. You've been awful good.

JULIE. Nonsense! I liked it. I really believe she knows me now.

ANNIE. Of course she does. She—she's an awful good baby.

JULIE. Indeed she is. With very wonderful manners and a most engaging smile. Aren't you, baby?

ANNIE. I mean she's healthy, an' I've always kep' 'er clean. I've always managed to do that.

JULIE. Yes, I'm sure you have. And that's so important. Isn't it?

ANNIE. Yes—but it's hard. It costs an awful lot to be clean.

JULIE. Oh—yes, I suppose it does. [*Leaning over the baby*] Baby, you've got the cunningest, most tinsy-weeny—adorable nose I ever saw in my life. Oh see—see how she curls her fingers around mine. Look! Isn't that too sweet!

ANNIE. Un-hun.

JULIE. See—she won't let go. Think of there being any strength in those delicate little things. Hello, baby. You've had a beautiful nap—yes you have—and your cheeks are like roses. You *are* wonderful—you blessed little—*little* thing. Do you know I've never really known a baby before. They *are* marvelous.

ANNIE. Do you like her?

JULIE. Of course.

ANNIE. What I wanted to say to you was—you don't happen to know anybody wants a baby, do you?

JULIE. What?

ANNIE. I mean—to adopt one. There's a lot of it done, you know. Lots of people—rich people—is awful glad to get babies without going through the trouble of havin' 'em. An' it *is* a trouble, God knows. I used to be awful strong. I did, honest. *She's* strong and healthy. Nobody don't need to be afraid of that miss. You believe me, don't you?

JULIE. But—you don't want to give up your *own* baby.

ANNIE. No. I don't want to. But somehow I kind a feel as if it might be better. I kind a have a feelin' I ain't going to last long.

JULIE. Oh, don't say that.

ANNIE. An' I—I—ain't so sure about Bill nohow.

JULIE. Aren't you?

ANNIE. I kind a' thought some of your swell friends might like her.

JULIE. My "swell friends" are a thing of the past—and they aren't very keen about babies.

ANNIE. Or I kind a' thought maybe you might like her yourself—seeing you took such a likin' to her—or you'd know *somebody*. Don't you, Miss? Honest, Miss, I mean it.

JULIE. There isn't a single being in the whole world I could ask to help you or one tiny little thing I could do for you myself.

ANNIE. Oh— [*Looking at Julie like a hurt dog and lowering her head*] Oh, I thought a lady like you could do anything—if she wanted to.

JULIE. “A lady like me” is a very helpless thing and more unhappy than you. You have your baby and you’re going to Bill. I’m going to people who don’t want me, and when I get to the end of my journey I’ll have about ten dollars left in my pocketbook—a few clothes in their last stages—and that’s all. And my ticket must be paid for—somehow—some way.

ANNIE. Oh my! That *is* bad,—ain’t it?

JULIE. I’m telling you so you won’t think me a beast. I’m sorry but—you—you’ll be all right—when you get to your husband.

ANNIE. I’m sorry for *you*, lady. You look like you ought to be awful happy.

JULIE. Yes, I think myself I *ought* to be—but I’m not. You—you’ll never be alone—and quite unhappy—with *her*—will you?

ANNIE. If I was only sure I could last long enough to pull her through till she’s a big girl—that’s all.

JULIE. But you will. You must.

ANNIE [*Touching her chest*] It’s here. I’m all gone here somehow.

JULIE. I—wish there was—something I could do.

ANNIE. Thank you, Miss.

[*Annie goes back to her seat with the baby. Julie sits absorbed in her thoughts. Jim enters, going to his seat.*]

LILY. Come on, grandma. Let’s go to supper.

MRS. BAY. All right. I’m ready. But we mustn’t eat as much as we did last night. It costs entirely too

much. We could have got along without that poor soup just as well as not.

CHARLES. Come on, Frank. [*To Lily*] We can all sit at the same table.

MRS. BAY. Are the young men coming too? That's nice. Come along. I like young people.

FRANK [*Taking Mrs. Bay by the arm*] Be careful. She's hitting it up pretty high just now.

LILY. Oh, don't tell her that.

MRS. BAY. What?

FRANK [*Very loudly to Mrs. Bay*] It's a nice evening.

[*Lily goes out after Frank and Mrs. Bay. Julie rises and walks restlessly to the end of the car. Charles turns and goes back to Julie.*]

CHARLES. Here's the book you gave Lily. I read it too. I hope you don't mind.

JULIE. I'm delighted. Did you like it?

CHARLES. Y-e-s.

JULIE. Oh, was it as bad as that?

CHARLES. I spent most of the time wondering why *you* like it.

JULIE. Then it wasn't a success.

CHARLES. Oh yes it was, only I'm not exactly "on."

JULIE. Don't try to put so much into it. It's only nice nonsense.

CHARLES. Will you let me come and ask you about it, after dinner?

JULIE. I'll let you come and *tell* me about it.

CHARLES. Don't think I'm fresh, but the girl in it seems—just like you.

JULIE. Goodness! Why?

CHARLES. That's what I'd like to talk about.

JULIE. This is going to be *very* interesting.

CHARLES. It will be for me.

[*He beams on her with shy adoration and goes out.*]

JULIE [*Going to lean over Annie's seat*] Won't you go to your dinner now while the baby's so quiet?

ANNIE. I would like to, if you don't mind, Miss. You sure have been good doin' it. I don't know how I could a' got on without you.

[*Annie goes out.*]

JIM. Aren't you going to miss this new habit of yours—minding the baby?

JULIE [*Going to Jim's section and sitting opposite him*] It's too bad you haven't a place for mothers and babies in your camp. That poor woman seems rather desperate.

JIM. I'm going to have—a baby farm some day. When you catch the kiddies young enough you can bring up a fine crop. That's really better than making them over after they're grown up. You've struck my hobby now.

JULIE. Really? Then maybe you *could* take this baby.

JIM. Wish I could. Nothing's ready yet.

JULIE. She doesn't seem to be any too sure that her husband wants her.

JIM. Bill, you mean.

JULIE. Yes.

JIM. I don't think Bill *is* a husband—at least not Annie's.

JULIE. What? What makes you think that?

JIM. Just a hunch.

JULIE. Poor thing. Poor thing. [*A long pause*]

Haven't you anything to amuse you out there in your camp? It must be horribly desolate with just men.

JIM. Not on your life. Turn a lot of men loose together out in the open and they're boys again. It's only when I get back where women are that I miss 'em. That's when a fellow's lonely—in a crowd—women to left of you, women to right of you, and none of 'em yours. They seemed prettier than ever in New York this time—and further away.

JULIE. And don't you know *any*?

JIM. Not one. Not since *the* one. She hung on as long as she could while I was drinking myself into a beast and then—it all snapped. That was the jolt that sent me out there. That's how the camp happened—and the trying to pull up other fellows.

JULIE. I see. I wondered. And—are you satisfied with that?

JIM. While I'm at it with my teeth in it hard I am. It's only when I come back that I want something more.

JULIE. Doesn't she know now what you've done?

JIM. No.

JULIE. Why don't you let her know?

JIM. What's the use? Too late. Married I s'pose.

JULIE. And isn't there anything to look forward to—but just your work out there?

JIM. Nothing. That's enough. It grows like blazes.

JULIE. But how do you—the money—I don't see how—

JIM. Oh, money's the easiest part of it. I just took a fellow back home now. That's what brought

me East—a fellow that's been out there six months and got back the decency that was pretty nearly gone. I took him home to a heartbroken woman and they're both so grateful—that they've given me a big boost with money for the place. That happens every once in a while. Oh, I've got great schemes for the future. It's a live wire all right.

JULIE. Oh, but it's so far away from everything—the *real* world.

JIM. The *real* world is life—and the same life runs through us all.

JULIE. Oh, nonsense!

JIM. Real life—with all the layers of luxury and class ripped off—down to the bone. It takes a lot of living to *know* that.

JULIE. If you're trying to tell me that what I'm going through will make me over into something better you never were so mistaken in your life. Why pretend I can be good and noble just because I'm unhappy? Everything in the world I've lived *with* and *for* is gone. The aunt who took me when I was a little girl and lavished everything that was beautiful and exquisite on me—has suddenly lost her money and turned me off. There's not a single spot on earth where I can go—except out to my brother in this little town. He's a doctor and has seven children and a wife I've never seen and she'll hate me and I'll hate her—and it's all disgusting and sordid and no *ideas* nor *ideals* can change it. You might as well take a fish out of the sea and tell him he can live just as well on the land—and that it's *his* fault if he doesn't.

JIM. You and the fish are a little different. If

civilization *does* produce a higher breed its highness is only tested and proven *by the way* it *lives* when *life* is hardest. If you're going to let unhappiness smash you—then you're *not* the high product you think you are. You don't think I'm horribly impertinent, do you?

JULIE. No. What difference does it make? We'll never see each other again.

[*Rising and going back to her own section and then suddenly letting herself speak with an intimacy and warm charm which she has not allowed herself before.*]

I've talked more—*really* talked to you—in these three days than I've ever talked in my life.

JIM. Of course—because all the silly little stickers of convention were knocked in the head when you lost your ticket and you *had* to take help from somebody.

JULIE. You make me out an awful prig.

JIM. Well you are—aren't you?

JULIE [*Laughing a little*] I suppose so. Oh—this flying along through space—shut up tight with a few people—is a funny thing, isn't it?

JIM [*Going to her section to sit*] I like it. It's got a sort of getting together feeling about it. The outside world stops.

JULIE. Yes. I used to hate it but I've been thinking all day how much easier it would be to keep on going—then to *stop* tomorrow night.

JIM. And you could keep on minding the baby.

JULIE. She's so sweet. She knows me now.

JIM. And I could keep on talking to you. Lord how I have talked! I've spilled it all out.

JULIE. So have I.

JIM. Oh, no, you haven't.

JULIE. A lot anyway.

JIM. I haven't talked to a woman like you since—well—

JULIE. You're a strange person—aren't you?

JIM. Not a bit.

JULIE. You seem to have all the nice things that—that—a—you know.

JIM. You mean I don't eat with my knife?

JULIE. Yes—and yet you seem to be utterly and absolutely free from every convention on earth.

JIM. You could be too.

JULIE. Never.

JIM. Oh, yes. And you'll never draw a long full breath and get all the air that's coming to you till you *are* free.

JULIE. What do you mean?

[*They are leaning toward each other—drawn by a strong mutual attraction and giving way with a certain abandon.*]

JIM. Outside things make you and control you. Even here—sitting here alone—cut off from everything—you're measuring things with your same old tape measure—not really approving of yourself because you're talking to me—

JULIE. Oh—

JIM. You're tied up by thousands of outside things—and your *real* self—has never been let loose at all.

JULIE. I'm *not* tied up. I'm—I'm—*protected* by tradition—if that's what you mean.

JIM. That's the polite way of saying you're frozen by a lot of damned nonsense.

JULIE. Good manners and good form are only the

result of good sense. Because I observe them doesn't mean that my *mind* isn't free.

JIM. You don't know what freedom means.

JULIE. Nonsense! Of course I do.

JIM. No, you don't. *I'm* talking to *you* because I *want* to. Who you are—what you are—where you came from—doesn't matter. But you're talking to me over a very high fence—just taking a little peek at a queer animal out of sheer curiosity and because as you said, just now—It doesn't matter—you'll never see me again.

JULIE. But I'm not so—

JIM. Oh yes, you are—much more so—

JULIE. Well at least you must admit *this*—I'm being much freer and much more wildly unconventional for *me* than *you* are for *you*. You're used to it. It's nothing at all for you to pick up a stranger and treat him like a friend. In fact, I heard you tell Annie there's no such animal—as a stranger.

JIM. There's something in that but when you get off the train this little incident will close for you—but for me it will *stick* as something I've lost.

JULIE. I—I shall *remember*. Not only the money and the ticket but you've made these days interesting that would have been long and dreary.

JIM. But nevertheless I *am*—an incident—to you.

JULIE. Y-e-s. But—what—you've done—and what you've been these three days will stand out all alone as something big and free and sweet—and—and different—apart from place and people—and anything I've ever known or ever will know again.

JIM. Then why don't you keep it?

JULIE. It couldn't last if I ever saw you again. Every day life would kill it.

JIM. Can't every day life have in it anything you *want* to put into it?

JULIE. Oh, you don't know— [*She draws back suddenly as the others begin to come back*] Oh, these people—

[*Mrs. Bay, Lily, Frank and Charles come in from the diner, all watching Julie as they walk by. Jim goes back to his seat.*]

Mr. Smith comes in with a large unlighted cigar in his mouth. He struts down to the other end of the car and back—with the air of taking a constitutional—oblivious of the other people—and meets Mrs. Welch as he turns.]

MRS. WELCH. [*As she comes in from the diner—seeing the cigar*] Well! This isn't the smoker.

MR. SMITH. No, but this is *my* cigar.

MRS. WELCH. I thought you had it lighted. Excuse me.

MR. SMITH. All I need is a match. Got one? [*Jim gives a box of matches to Mr. Smith.*]

MRS. WELCH [*To Julie*] Does he own the yacht?

MR. SMITH. [*Having lighted his cigar—much to Mrs. Welch's horrified amazement*] Don't be alarmed I'm not going to stay out here.

MRS. WELCH. I should hope not.

MR. SMITH. [*Giving the matches back to Jim*] Much obliged! [*Mr. Smith and Mrs. Welch try to pass each other but find the aisle inconveniently narrow.*]

MRS. WELCH. *Well*—I've never had any trouble before in my life getting through an aisle.

MR. SMITH. I can't say I ever have either.

MRS. WELCH. [*Moving into one of the sections*] I'll step in here if you'll be accommodating enough to walk by.

MR. SMITH. That's what I've been trying to do for some time. [*Mr. Smith waddles on into his drawing room.*]

MRS. WELCH [*To Jim and Julie*] Don't he take the prize as a human swine? Wouldn't you think nobody else was on earth but him?

JULIE. He's just a little more outspoken than most of us. I don't know that he's so very different.

MRS. WELCH. There may be *some* people just *exactly* like him. But I don't happen to be that kind. Porter, why haven't you got my berth made up? [*As the porter comes in with sheets and pillow cases*] Do it right away. [*She takes her bag and goes into the ladies' dressing room.*]

PORTER. Yas'm.

JULIE. How contented she is with herself! It's wonderful.

FRANK. [*To Lily*] Here's an awfully pretty little piece of poetry in this magazine. Don't you want to read it to me?

LILY. Oh, I couldn't.

FRANK. Yes, you could. Please.

LILY. Oh *dear!* I used to recite at school but I don't believe I could read this to you.

FRANK. Come on, please.

LILY [*Reading the poetry in a sing-song sentimental way*]

Sweetheart, be my sweetheart
When birds are on the wing
When bee and bud and babbling flood
Bespeak the birth of spring.
Come sweetheart, be my sweetheart,
And wear this posy ring.

Sweetheart, be my sweetheart
In the golden summer glow
Of the earth aflush with gracious blush
Which the ripening fields foreshow.
Dear sweetheart, be my sweetheart,
As into the moon we go.

Sweetheart, be my sweetheart
When falls the bounteous year,
When the fruit and the wine of tree and vine
Give us their harvest cheer.
Oh sweetheart, be my sweetheart,
For winter draweth near.

[*During this the porter brings in a step ladder from left and stepping upon it, hangs the curtains for Mrs. Welch's berth. Julie sits quietly looking out the window. Jim reads in his own seat.*]

MRS. BAY [*As Lily finishes the third verse*] What is it, Lily? Read it to me.

[*Lily sits forward and reads the last verse in a louder voice. Mrs. Bay leaning towards her and keeping time with her head*]

Sweetheart, be my sweetheart
When the year is white and old
When the fire of youth is spent forsooth
And the hand of age is cold.
Yet sweetheart, be my sweetheart,
Till the year of love is told.

CHARLES [*As Lily finishes*] Oh slush!

JIM [*Going back to Julie*] The thing I've been waiting to say to you is this—

JULIE. What? Say it.

JIM. Why didn't you fight it out for yourself back there—since you hate coming out here so fiercely?

JULIE. Fight it out? Make my own living, you mean? Because I don't know how. I'm going out here because it's the only place on earth I can go and I'll be a horrible burden to them, and still I haven't the courage to jump off the train. Ridiculous— isn't it?

JIM. Haven't you ever wanted to work with your hands? To take hold of a thing and *do it*—make it go because you *willed* and were making your own power?

JULIE. No.

JIM. See here. It's all up to you whether you're beaten or not. You've got two things to choose from. Either to go back to this little town and shrivel up into a bitter old woman—or to live by giving what you've got to other people. If you *have* got something fine and precious which lifts you apart from the common herd—then give it out to other people. Give it—give —*give*.

JULIE. I haven't anything to give.

JIM. Then why didn't you marry somebody and stay back there where you say you belong?

JULIE. He only had six thousand a year. That isn't enough. Oh, you needn't laugh. It's true. He was right.

JIM. Six thousand a year not enough for one man to make one woman happy?

JULIE. What do you think it takes to make one woman happy?

JIM. Love—love and work.

JULIE. Oh yes—but the man!

JIM. She must have the eyes to see him when he's there. The heart to love him—the hands to work with him. The courage to take him when he comes.

JULIE. [*Coming out of the spell and drawing back from him*] Oh—we *are* flying through space—up in the clouds. Stern reality is waiting at the other end. Why don't I jump off the train now—now?

JIM. I'll open the door for you—if you want to do it.

JULIE. Do you mean that?

JIM. I do.

JULIE. Will you help me?

JIM. I'll open the door.

JULIE. Would it be right?

JIM. It's your right—if you want it.

JULIE. It would save a lot of trouble for other people.

JIM. Well, are you going to do it?

JULIE. Yes. [*She starts to rise, he takes her by the arms.*]

JIM. Some man was a coward not to keep you,

JULIE. You can't blame him.

JIM. Did you love him?

JULIE. I would have married him.

JIM. He was a fool and a coward.

JULIE. Oh, no.

JIM. Oh, yes. Why didn't he hold you and fight for you?

JULIE. I'm not worth it.

JIM. You are to me. [*Holding her by the wrists*]

JULIE. Oh—

JIM. Let me help you. Isn't that better than what you've started to do? Give yourself another chance. There's so much of life waiting for you. Don't do it. Wait.

JULIE. Oh, I—

JIM. You've fallen out of the skies for me. You're what I've lost and what I've wanted every day—every hour. Your life is in your own two hands. Are you going to throw it away or let me try to make things right for you? Wait just a little. Give me a chance to make you know me. Don't end it now.

JULIE. If this were all—yes—to sit here—with you. But this isn't real—talking to you like this.

JIM. It is.

JULIE. No. It's just a wild moment or two—when I'm letting go because nothing matters.

JIM. They're *real* moments.

JULIE. No—no they are not. This isn't *me*.

JIM. It's the *real* you.

JULIE. No. It's something new. I'm talking to you because I don't care—and because you're strange and wonderful and there's something in you I—I've

been looking for in someone else. I wanted it so—to cling to. To believe in. I don't want to live. I don't. I don't! Thank you— Oh thank you for all you've done for me.

JIM. I haven't done anything—but I could—I could!

JULIE. It's so strange to be pouring out my heart to you like this.

JIM. No, it isn't.

JULIE. I seem to want to tell you everything. [*She begins to sob—Jim puts his hand on hers to stop her as Mrs. Welch, singing, comes from the dressing room at R. end in a flamboyant kimona. She stops near Lily and the boys. Julie puts her head on her arm on the back of her seat and Jim, remaining where he is, takes up a book.*]

MRS. WELCH. Why don't you all go to bed? It's the best way to kill time I know of. Haven't you talked yourselves out yet?

CHARLES [*Rising—looking Mrs. Welch over with a twinkle*] I've just thought of something else I might say.

MRS. WELCH. What?

CHARLES. I—won't tell.

MRS. WELCH. Our friends down there are going to elope I think if the train ever stops. [*The boys and Lily turn to stare at Julie.*]

MRS. BAY. What's the matter? What did she say?

LILY. Nothing, Grandma.

MRS. BAY [*Pointing to Julie*] Don't talk to that lady any more, Lily.

PORTER [*Coming to tap Mrs. Bay on the shoulder—*

with sheets and pillow cases over his arm] I'm ready for you now.

SMITH [*Coming out of the drawing room in time to hear this*] No, you don't. I'm waiting.

PORTER [*Hurrying into the drawing room*] Comin' sir. Comin'.

MRS. BAY. You boys scuttle away now. I'm going to get ready for bed myself. [*Mrs. Welch goes to her own berth and disappears behind the curtains. Mrs. Bay takes her suitcase and goes out. Leo strolls in from the diner at left, complacently using a toothpick.*]

LILY. Oh, look. That's the first toothpick I've seen since I left home.

LEO [*Stopping by Julie*] Well—one day more and we'll all get out of this box. You get off tomorrow, don't you?

JULIE [*Unnerved and desperate*] I don't know. Yes, I do.

LEO. I guess you and me are the only Eastern parties in the bunch. The others are going home to roost. When you've seen as much of the country as I have you can spot 'em with one squint. This tall party here—turned in I guess— [*Nodding towards Mrs. Welch's berth*] thinks she is putting it all over us. Funny, ain't it? [*Leo strolls back to his own section.*]

MRS. WELCH [*Making violent movements behind her curtains and thrusting her shoes out*] Porter! Take those shoes and give them a good shine. A good one. Is that you, Porter?

LEO. Guess again.

MRS. WELCH. Well, where on earth is he? He's never in the right place. [*She throws shoes into the aisle—hitting Leo.*] Give him these.

LEO. Here, do your rough housin' on the inside. There's passers by out here.

CHARLES [*Coming down the aisle*] Is it safe to go by?

LEO. I wouldn't risk it.

MRS. WELCH [*Emerging from her curtains—finishing the braiding of her hair*] Oh, Lord! I've bumped my head so I can't tell whether I'm coming or goin'.

LEO. Believe me your *goin' some*.

MRS. BAY [*Coming down the aisle*] Can I get by?

LEO. Not if I was the judge. [*Looking at Mrs. Bay who has put on her night cap and dressing gown.*]

MRS. WELCH. That reminds me. I lost my boudoir cap this morning and never did find it. I wonder if that blamed porter took it.

ANNIE [*Coming in, in time to hear this*] It's under the seat, Missus. I seen it.

MRS. WELCH. Why on earth didn't you say so?

LEO. I'll get it for you. [*Leo dives for the missing cap and brings it out.*]

MRS. WELCH. Well upon my soul! Wouldn't that jar you! Thanks. [*Mrs. Welch tucks up her braid and puts on the cap—a most elaborate affair of lace, ribbons and flowers.*] Now if anybody disturbs me tonight, they'll wish they hadn't.

LEO. I promise I won't.

MRS. WELCH. Good night everybody. [*She disappears again.*]

CHARLES. Nightie-night.

LEO. I don't know but that I prefer Grandma's.

[*Indicating grandma's cap. He takes up a magazine.*]

JIM [*to Julie*] Don't be so unhappy. Don't.

JULIE. Oh, how white and big and soft that cloud is, and how fast it's sailing! I wish I could be caught up in it and disappear.

JIM. We don't get off so easily. We only get what we have the courage to take. Throw away the part that's been a disappointment and a failure. Look the new thing in the face.

JULIE. I can only see one thing—my own despair and I can't face it. I can't! I want to escape it and I only know one way. You said you'd open the door for me.

JIM. I won't.

JULIE. Then I'm going anyway. [*She rises.*]

JIM [*Catching her*] I won't let you go. [*There is a crash. The lights go out—wild shrieks and cries—the sound of glass breaking and wood splitting. Pandemonium and darkness. Gradually words are distinguished above the cries and groans.*]

JIM. Are you alive?

JULIE. Yes! My head! I'm falling!

JIM. Do you want to live or die?

JULIE. I want to live! Help me!

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

TIME: *Five o'clock the next morning.*

PLACE: *A hill top covered with stubby grass, low bushes and a few trees. A bleak bare place. Cold grey dawn is coming on.*

AT CURTAIN: *Leo appears dragging after him Mrs. Welch. Mr. Smith also emerges half pushing her from the back. The three are in an extremely dilapidated condition—their clothes torn and mud stained—their hair wildly disheveled. Mr. Smith is in pajamas and a raincoat—and one eye is conspicuously black and bruised. Mrs. Welch wears the dressing gown of Act II with a blanket about her shoulders. Her hair stands out in wisps and bunches but the cap dejected and bedrabbled is still in evidence. Leo is ghastly pale with a long cut on one cheek. The three gasping for breath reach the top and look disconsolately about.*

LEO. *It's the top.*

MRS. WELCH. *Thank God! Let me sit down or I'll drop. Anything to get away from these horrors! I'll never get over this night—never to my dying day!*

LEO. *You want to be damn thankful it wasn't your dying night. [Leo and Smith each holding Mrs. Welch by an arm manage to help her sit on a rock.]*

MRS. WELCH [*Groaning elaborately*] *Oh—oh—oh! I'm black and blue all over.*

SMITH [*Much chastened by the ordeals of the night*]

Are you comfortable now? I wish all our fellow passengers could come up to this place. I'd like them to share our blessings. [*Sitting laboriously near Mrs. Welch*]

MRS. WELCH. You're so kind.

LEO [*Laughing*] You might chase down and get some of your fellow passengers.

SMITH. I'll make an effort.

MRS. WELCH. No, you won't. You must be very tired. Let the other fellow do it.

LEO [*Laughing still harder and looking at Mr. Smith and Mrs. Welch in amazement*] Misfortunes sure do make quick bed fellows.

MRS. WELCH. Say, are you trying to be funny? Don't, it's too early in the morning.

LEO. You're right, it's too early in the morning for anything, even for a sunrise. [*He goes up back, looking down and shouting as he sees someone below.*] Hey—hi—boys! Come on up. What? Yes, you can. Bring her up. Yes you can. Make a cat's cradle and carry her—like this. [*Showing how to make a cat's cradle.*] That's the idea.

MRS. WELCH. Carry her? Carry who?

LEO. The young girl. She's all right but she can't walk.

SMITH. Do you see any more of our fellow passengers down there?

LEO. N-no. But I can see the engine. She must have just about turned a somersault.

MRS. WELCH. Oh don't!

LEO. The first cars are all on top of her—where she took the header.

MRS. WELCH. I'll always ride in the last coach after this. That's what saved us.

SMITH. We have many blessings. [*Sneezing violently.*]

LEO. Blessin's are loomin' up big now, ain't they? [*Looking down the hill again*] And I can see that Jim West fella out there where they're mendin' the bridge—bossin' the job and workin' harder'n anybody with his busted arm and shoulder.

MRS. WELCH. *And he broke it saving her.* More's the pity.

SMITH. Do you think it's a pity she's saved?

MRS. WELCH. I don't go as far as to say that.

SMITH. It's very deplorable—she's rapidly getting worse. When I saw her last—she was in a very bad way—almost raving.

LEO. That may not last long but you can't tell. Sometimes when you're hit in the head like that you go back to a certain time and don't remember anything else in between.

SMITH. It isn't a going back with her—rather a going forward. And she blurts it all right out in a kind of semi-sane—semi-insane—you can't really tell the dividing line as to which is which.

MRS. WELCH. You bet you can't. She's got you fooled to a finish—you men. Lord, how a woman *can* fool men!

LEO. You're fooled this trip as sure as you're born— She's nutty—clean gone.

MR. SMITH. And a *very* strange case.

MRS. WELCH. Oh you make me sick. Why she's just *slick*. That's all—no more *crazy* than I am.

She's up against it. Hasn't a cent in the world. Doesn't want to *go* where she's *got* to go and she's going to get something out of *this*. She's going to get a *man* someway. Look out. [*Looking at Smith*] If she don't get the other one she'll have you before you know it.

SMITH [*Much flattered*] Oh I'm afraid she wouldn't look at me.

MRS. WELCH. *Wouldn't* she? She's not *straight*, I tell you.

LEO. You're barkin' up the wrong tree.

MRS. WELCH. Oh! You can't tell a woman anything about *women*.

SMITH. I don't know—I sometimes think, my dear Madam—

MRS. WELCH. My name's Welch. For heaven's sake stop *madaming* me.

SMITH. I sometimes think my dear Mrs. Welch—

LEO. You sometimes think a man's the only animal that knows a good woman when he sees one—and right you are, my friend. The lady in question is as straight as a die but as loony as a bed bug. What do you call this? She walked straight up to him—before the whole push—and said [*Imitating Julie*] “I would rather have lost my life a *thousand times*, than to have had you suffer like this for *me*. I only hope the beauty of what you have done repays you.” Now you know that's not naughty—but bughouse—bughouse.

SMITH. She said some very strange things to me, too. Something about how ridiculously clear it all is once one sees with the eyes of the soul. It's very sad—very.

MRS. WELCH. Rubbish! Don't tell me I don't know a crazy woman from a bad one. I'll put a question to *him*—West—that'll show her up before you all. She's trying to make *us* think he's asked her to marry him. *He* ought to be put *wise* to it and I'll do it. Oh Lord, I'm so cold and starving and ache so I could yell!

SMITH. Would you be more comfortable if you leaned on me?

MRS. WELCH. I might. [*Smith turns about and Mrs. Welch leans on his back.*]

LEO. [*Calling down the hill*] Good work! That's the business. Slick as a whistle.

[*Charles and Frank appear carrying Lily in a cat's cradle. These three also show the ravages of the wreck. Lily is exhausted with fatigue and her head droops against Frank's. One foot and leg are clumsily tied up in a sheet.*] Put her over here! Give me this, I'll fix it. [*Taking the blanket which is over Frank's shoulders and spreading it on a log.*]

CHARLES. That's the stuff.

FRANK. Be careful. [*As they put her down.*]

LILY. [*Faintly.*] Oh, what a lovely place.

MRS. WELCH. [*Shivering and hugging herself in her blanket*] Yeh—beautiful! Might just as well be home in your own bed it's so warm and cozy.

LILY. You've all been so kind. Everybody. I wish Grandma could come up here. She isn't hurt a bit. Isn't it wonderful!

SMITH. I might make the effort to go and get her. [*Mrs. Welch digs Smith violently with her elbow for him to keep still.*]

CHARLES. She's all right. Miss New York's got her.

LILY. Miss Rutherford—her name is. Isn't she wonderful? A regular angel of mercy she's been all night. Helping everybody. She's done some perfectly marvelous things. The doctors say so.

MRS. WELCH. Oh, I don't know. I held one woman's head myself for about an hour. But when the doctor came along and said she was going to die anyway, I thought I might as well give that job up.

SMITH. The Almighty has been very good to us and has watched over us. [*Sneezing again*]

MRS. BAY. [*Bobbing up at the back. Her hair is down her back—her bonnet on one side, her dress skirt over one arm, her petticoat very torn and bedraggled, but she is smiling and cheerful and extremely spry in her movements.*] Well, well, well, how did you poor people manage to get up that hill? It's quite a climb for you.

LILY. Oh, grandma, I thought Miss Rutherford was taking care of you.

MRS. BAY. What? [*Coming down to Lily*]

CHARLES. [*Hurrying quickly to speak in Mrs. Bay's ear*] She thought Miss Rutherford was taking care of you.

MRS. BAY. Fiddlesticks! I ran away. I'm so sick of everybody trying to take care of me, I couldn't stand it another minute. Everybody's calling for her. They need her—I don't. [*Going to look at Mrs. Welch and Mr. Smith*] Well—how are you? Trouble of any kind goes hard with fat people, but cheer up, you don't feel half as bad as you think you do.

[*Crossing over to Lily*] Lily, don't pamper yourself too much. You must walk on that leg pretty soon before it gets stiff.

MRS. WELCH. If anything could have made me feel worse, it's a dose of damn cheerfulness early in the morning.

LEO. [*Shaking hands with Mrs. Bay*] You're the gamest little sport I ever did see.

MRS. BAY. What? Oh yes, good morning, I didn't recognize you at first. I don't know your name.

LEO. My name is— Call me Leo.

[*Jim comes up the hill. His left arm is in a rough sling.*]

MRS. WELCH. Oh, here's Mr. West. Has anything come?

SMITH. Any relief in sight?

JIM. Not yet.

MRS. WELCH. Isn't anybody doing anything?

JIM. Yes, I think everybody's doing everything. The bridge is mended. I came up to see if you people are all right. Oh, I say, it must be pretty cold for you women sitting on the ground, isn't it? Suppose you fellows pick up some wood and build a fire. That would be about the best thing that could happen, wouldn't it?

FRANK. Let's go to it.

CHARLES. Right you are!

SMITH. I might make the effort to go with them.

LEO. Yes, you might.

MRS. WELCH. No, you mightn't. [*Turning to Leo*] You leave him alone.

JIM. It's going to be pretty hard to find any small

stuff around here. Try pretty well over there, see? [*Pointing down the hill. Turning to Leo.*] I advise you to slow up.—You've worked like a nailer. About all in, aren't you?

FRANK. That's right, don't come.

CHARLES. [*Giving Leo a push.*] Lie down, Fido!

LEO. [*Dropping on the ground as though Charles had knocked him down.*] Thanks for them kind words.

MRS. WELCH. [*Groaning vociferously*] Oh-h-h will we ever get out of this?

MRS. BAY. What?

MRS. WELCH. Oh-h-h-h-h! [*Burying her head in her arms, unable to cope with Mrs. Bay's deafness and cheerfulness.*]

JIM [*Raising his voice to Mrs. Bay*] We're pretty lucky to be here, aren't we?

MRS. BAY. Indeed we are! When I was thrown out in the aisle and people began walking on my stomach, and I heard the howls and groans I thought I had died and gone to hell, and all my life passed before me, and I wondered why I was *there*, when I heard our baby cry, and recognized it, and I never heard anything so sweet in all my life.

MRS. WELCH. Well, I didn't think any great and noble dying thoughts. All I wanted was to get hold of those railroad officials and I will, too. If they don't pay for my new spring clothes, I'll know the reason why.

LEO. [*Sitting on a rock.*] When I took the header through the window and felt the glass flying, I said to myself, "Well, Leo, it's *come*, and you ain't got no accident policy." That's the first thing I do now

when I get back to Broadway, take out a traveller's insurance policy. You hate to spend the money while you're alive, but when you do cash in, it would be a nice idea to be able to say to yourself, "*Somebody pays heavy for this.*" I could see that last night when the bump came.

JIM. Yes, it's wonderful what we see in that last flash, isn't it? The things we wish we hadn't done and the things we think we would do if we only had another day to do them in.

LILY. Do your arm and shoulder pain perfectly terribly all the time, Mr. West?

JIM. Oh no, they're all right.

LILY. You broke them in such a perfectly beautiful way.

JIM. Yes, it was nice, wasn't it?

MRS. WELCH. Pretty expensive business for you—saving her life and breaking yourself to pieces.

JIM. Well, I guess it's worth it, when you think how many she's saved herself, since.

LEO. That's a good way to check it up.

MRS. WELCH. She's a new breed to me. Just what do *you* say she is, West?

JIM. That's more than I can even try to say.

LILY. There's something so strange about her now.

JIM. Yes, do you see?

MRS. WELCH. How could a child see? To put it in plain English, do you think she's off her head since she was hit, or do you think she's something else?

JIM. [*With a slow, whimsical smile*] That depends a good deal on how you look at it, doesn't it?

MRS. WELCH. Oh—you're not on—*yet*.

LILY. Oh her mind couldn't be gone, could it?

LEO. Certainly, it could. Couldn't it, West, dead easy?

LILY. She said to me just a little while ago—

[*She stops as Julie appears at the back carrying the baby. Julie's clothes are also torn and mud stained, her hair disheveled, her face pale—a man's handkerchief tied about her forehead but there is shining out of her a sort of exaltation which radiates an intensity of energy, and rather a disconcerting honesty and simplicity—seeing things for the first time and expecting everyone else to see them the same way. There is a pause as they all turn to look at her and feel in her a subdued excitement.*]

JULIE. [*In a breathless tone.*] She's gone.

MRS. WELCH. Who?

JULIE. Annie. [*Looking at Jim.*] You thought she was going to live—didn't you—but the shock and the whole thing were— She's gone.

[*There is a pause and a sympathetic murmur.*]

JIM. Yes, I thought she'd pull through.

JULIE. I believe she was glad to go—poor little woman. You were right. She wasn't married to Bill.

MRS. WELCH. Who's Bill?

JULIE. The man she was going to. And she was afraid to take the baby to him—and afraid she couldn't take care of it herself and just afraid—afraid of everything—afraid to live.

MRS. WELCH. She had no business to die. What's going to become of that child?

JULIE. That was the hard thing for her and she was so unhappy about it. I said I *knew* I could find

someone to take her and love her—and the most beautiful look came into Annie's face—a sort of radiance and—she just closed her eyes and slipped away—into peace—with one hand still holding this little hand. So I brought the baby right up to you first, Mrs. Welch, because I know you are generous and kind and well off and would love to have her. [*Kneeling before Mrs. Welch with the baby.*]

MRS. WELCH. [*Drawing away in amazed alarm*] No! I can't stand children. Anyway Harry would have a fit. What are you talking about?

JULIE. Oh, I thought you'd think it was wonderful to get her like this.

MRS. WELCH. You'll have to think again.

JULIE. Wouldn't you like her, Mr. Smith?

SMITH. [*Gasping*] I'm an unmarried man, Miss.

JULIE. Well all the more splendid for you to get her like this.

SMITH. I— You— She— I'd like to accommodate you but it's really quite impossible.

MRS. WELCH. Of course it is. Even if anybody wanted to adopt a kid, who wants an illegitimate one with all its mother's bad traits?

JULIE. What has that to do with this love of a baby? Besides her mother was a very wonderful woman.

MRS. WELCH. What?

JULIE. Wasn't she, Mr. West?

JIM. [*With an intense shyness before this new and compelling Julie.*] What makes you think so?

JULIE. She understood and appreciated *you*, that was one of the reasons. She said, "Lady, that tall fel-

low is a great man." Don't you think that shows some great understanding?

JIM. She just wanted to see something decent in people. Poor little woman, she trusted too much.

JULIE. And never a word of littleness towards Bill. She said she loved him and that love had made her happy and that it was worth it all just to have had the baby to love for a little while. There's something rather splendid about that you know.

MRS. BAY. What is it, Lily? What are they talking about?

LILY. About adopting the baby. The mother died. Oh Grandma, couldn't we take the baby?

MRS. BAY. [*Hopping up*] My stars child, no. Your mother's raised one family and I've raised two, that's enough. [*Going to Julie*] What's the matter, do you have to find a home for it?

JULIE. Yes I do—I must.

MRS. BAY. She's a nice child. I'll see what our Church Society can do about it.

MRS. WELCH. That's a good idea.

SMITH. Excellent.

LEO. [*Drawing near Julie to look at the baby.*] She's a darned fine kid.

JULIE. [*Turning to him with the baby*] Isn't she? A blessed, blessed little precious thing!

LEO. [*Backing away*] But don't wish her on me, she ain't in my line. If she was a boy now, I'd stake him to pants as soon as he was ready, but I ain't got nothing in her line at all.

JIM. Don't worry, you'll find a place for her some way.

JULIE. Yes, I know, what we *want* to be, *can* be. That's true, isn't it? Every word you said has come true—more true, more glorious than you know. Something great enough to make up for this has come. [*Laying her hand tenderly on his broken arm.*] At least I want it to do that. Do you know what I mean?

JIM. [*Lowering his eyes*] Perhaps! Don't say it and there'll be nothing to unsay. [*He turns away towards the path.*]

JULIE. Are you going down?

JIM. Yes, and I'm going to see if any help has come. [*He goes down the hill.*]

JULIE. Annie was right, he *is* a great man and what's more, he's a good man, with something so big and sweet and revealing in him, that one sees God for the first time through him. Isn't that true?

MRS. WELCH. He's an ordinary good-hearted man ridin' on a railroad train, if that's what you mean.

JULIE. You hold her, Mrs. Welch, for a minute. If you've never had a baby, you don't know how wonderful it feels to have her in your arms. You hold her a minute and you'll love her. Oh, you don't know how sweet you are sitting there. It makes you look so much warmer and happier. [*Julie walks about restless and exalted.*]

SMITH. Now, now, don't excite yourself my dear young lady. You ought to go off to some quiet spot and lie down.

JULIE. Lie down?—I couldn't. I never felt so strong in my life.

LEO. [*Going to Julie anxiously*] Has the doctor examined your head very carefully?

JULIE. Oh, it's nothing but a cut and a bruise. Was I unconscious long?

SMITH. [*Going over to Julie very cautiously*] How do you—how do you—feel?

LEO. Do you seem to— How do things seem to you—pretty much exaggerated, eh? You haven't gone to the Golden Gates, or anything like that. Things are just as they were before you got hit.

JULIE. Oh no, the whole world has changed to me.

LEO. No—no—it's just everyday stuff, you know. A spade is still a spade.

JULIE. [*Exaltedly*] Yes, a spade is a spade but one can do wonderful things with it. I watched those men down there at work, all using their hands and some of them were so strong and clever and lifted those great beams and put them where they wanted them. They have come to the real things and are all working together for the same end—men—brothers.—It's wonderful. Haven't you felt it, the thrill of it? Hasn't it made you want to use your own arms and hands and strength and will to make life right? Hasn't it?

LEO. Does it pain you all the time? [*Pointing to her head*]

SMITH. [*Turning to Mrs. Welch*] It's taken rather a religious turn.

JULIE. [*Looking at Leo for the first time*] Oh Mr. Stern, did you know you have a very long cut across your cheek?

LEO. [*Backing away from her*] Oh no, no, you only think it.

JULIE. The doctor gave me a few things and I've

watched him till I can do it pretty well. You must let me bandage it for you. [*Taking a small bottle and a roll of bandage from the pockets of her sweater.*]

LEO. Oh no, I'm all right. I'm getting along very well, thank you. [*Trying to get away from her.*]

JULIE. No, you're not. Sit down here and let me do it right away.

LEO. [*Sitting very dubiously as Julie takes him by the arm*] I'm getting along all right this way, but I don't think I could stand anything more.

JULIE. Oh my, it is bad! You've got mud or something in the wound. [*Going at him with interested energy*]

LEO. You don't say! How careless of me!

JULIE. Fortunately I have this little bottle to wash it out with.

LEO. A bottle?

JULIE. I mean with what's *in* the bottle.

LEO. Oh!

JULIE. Now hold very still please.

LEO. I can't promise. [*Julie bathes the cut with alcohol.*] Jee-rusalem, is that pure alcohol?

JULIE. Perfectly pure.

LEO. It's a shame to waste it. [*Writhing in pain*]

JULIE. Oh, does it hurt so? It is a bad cut. I'm glad I had these things. Hold still. The only way the bandage seems to fit is this way. [*Putting it under his chin and over his head.*] I haven't got any more of those pins. You don't mind, do you?

LEO. Just so I don't look untidy. [*Trying to*

move his jaw.] And give me a little jaw action, if you don't mind, that's all I ask.

JULIE. There, I hope you'll be more comfortable.

LEO. [*As she allows him to get up*] I hope so too. I'm much obliged anyway. I take it just as you meant it.

JULIE. I haven't forgotten what you did to my eye, you know. I'm paying you back.

LEO. [*Keeping away from her*] You win, I'm paid. I think I'll go down and see if those fellows have forgotten all about that fire. [*He goes down.*]

JULIE. [*Taking the baby from Mrs. Welch and going to Lily.*] Wouldn't you like to hold the baby, Lily? Poor child, how sleepy you are! [*She puts the baby in Lily's arms and tucks a blanket about them.*]

SMITH. [*Rising, starting after Leo, turning back to glance at Julie and holding up a warning finger to Mrs. Welch.*] And be very cautious. I wouldn't irritate her.

MRS. BAY. I'll put on my dress skirt now. You see I saved it by taking it off.

JULIE. [*Sitting beside Lily.*] How do you feel?

LILY. Oh it hurts, but I don't mind. Are you—do—you feel—quite well?

JULIE. Yes.

LILY. I mean—I—I think I ought to tell you. Some of them think you're out of your head.

JULIE. That's wonderful! It's such a chance to speak the truth.

LILY. But you—you're not, are you?

JULIE. I'll tell you a secret. If I am—I want to be *always*. He's fallen out of the skies.

LILY. You mean? [*Julie nods.*] But—aren't you afraid? [*Julie shakes her head.*] Don't you think we—we—we ought to know a man—a long time—before we—we—fall in love?

JULIE. When the miracle happens, we *do* know him.

LILY. But oughtn't we to be friends first?

JULIE. Oh no. One has all one's life to be friends. Why ask love to wait?

LILY. Yes, but I was wondering.

JULIE. Oh, my dear little girl. He's a nice boy. Don't be afraid to let him know what you feel.

LILY. Yes, but grandma would be so—

JULIE. Yes, I know but don't hurt him. You may never see him again. It's a little flower of sweetness, you've gathered out of the horror. Let it blossom all it can.

LILY [*A little awestricken at Julie*] What made you like this now?

JULIE. Suffering and love.—They brought understanding.

MRS. WELCH [*Having gone to sleep and fallen over*] Oh, oh, oh, my back! My back!

[*Grandma and Julie run to her.*]

LILY. What is it?

MRS. WELCH. It's a cramp. It's killing me.

JULIE. Where is it?

MRS. WELCH. My back, my back! Oh Lord, what shall I do?

JULIE [*Rubbing Mrs. Welch's back vigorously*] Is that the place?

MRS. WELCH. No, lower down, lower down, lower down.

JULIE. Is that doing any good?

MRS. WELCH. I don't know that it is, but it might.

MRS. BAY. If I only had my good liniment!

JULIE. It's making me warm, anyway.

MRS. WELCH. You needn't do it on that account. Oh—oh—oh— [*Groaning with satisfaction*]

JULIE. Better? Better? Is that better?

MRS. WELCH. I don't know but that it is. Much obliged.

MRS. BAY. That's very apt to happen to fat people.

MRS. WELCH. I'm not fat.

[*Jim comes back up the hill.*]

JULIE. Couldn't you take a little exercise to get warm?

MRS. WELCH. Yes, I'd just love to swing dumbbells right now for my health.

JIM. Get up. Walk about. The worst thing you can do is to sit still, on that rock.

MRS. WELCH. Well, if you can show me anything better to sit on around here, I'll do it.

JIM. Get up, get up.

MRS. WELCH. I won't. Oh—oh—oh—oh! Must I?

JIM. Certainly. [*Mrs. Welch rises with the help of Julie and Mrs. Bay.*] Now walk.

MRS. WELCH. Don't boss me like that. I'm not used to it.

JIM. The sun's trying to show itself out there. It can't get in here just yet. Go out on that slope. That's where it will start first.

MRS. BAY [*Following Mrs. Welch*] Where are you going?

MRS. WELCH [*Shouting at Mrs. Bay and hobbling off*] To the jumping off place.

MRS. BAY. I'll come with you. I'm very sure-footed. [*Trotting after Mrs. Welch*]

JIM [*Looking at Lily*] She's asleep. Aren't you going? I'll stay here.

JULIE. What is it? Have I done anything to displease you?

JIM. Of course not.

JULIE. Or to disappoint you?

JIM. No.

JULIE. I'm trying so hard to show you how grateful I—

JIM. *Don't* please. You don't owe me anything. Nothing is different because I had the luck to save your life. Things are just as they were before all this happened.

JULIE. I know now that life *can* be all you said—big and sweet and wonderful—if *we* make it. I want to give all the rest of mine to you—to thank you.

JIM. That's what you mustn't think. That's what I won't let you say. That's what you can't do.

JULIE. Why not?

JIM. *You don't owe me anything.*

JULIE. But I—

JIM. You haven't changed because of *me*. You see and know because you've seen death and suffer-

ing. You're cold and hungry now and close to humanity and you've made things better for others by giving of *yourself*. That's why you're glad to be alive. It's yourself—yourself—not me.

JULIE. It all came *through* you.

JIM. No.

JULIE. But the things you said to me—

JIM. The things I asked when you were throwing yourself away—I don't ask now, and the things you said out of pity and gratitude are all washed out. The bridge is mended and you'll go over it—strong and on your feet. We're two travellers who have touched hands and are the better for it.

JULIE. What have I done? What's changed you?

JIM. You're reborn and further away from me than ever. When you're down there, on the level again [*Pointing down the hill*] out of the heights—you'll see me as I am—a plain man, not fit to touch you—separated from you by every law of your world.

JULIE [*Looking steadily into Jim's eyes*] You said she must have the eyes to see him when he's there—the courage to take him when he comes—the hands to work with him—the heart to love him. I'm here.

[*She stops as the voices of the boys are heard. Jim turns, about to go, when Frank appears—followed by Leo, Charles and Smith carrying wood for a fire.*]

LEO. Here fellows—here's a good place, over here. [*The men begin laying the fire.*]

FRANK [*Going to kneel by Lily*] Wake up. We're going to have a fire.

LILY. What? Oh goodness—where am I?

FRANK. Up at the top of the world.

LILY. Oh—I had the most wonderful dream.

FRANK. I guess you've got plenty of time to tell it before breakfast—so it'll come true.

LILY. I wish it would. I dreamed that I was never going to see you again.

FRANK. Oh say!

LILY. Wait, it was nice. I mean Mother didn't want me to write to you or have you come to see me—but it—it was sweet anyway—because I had *known* you.

FRANK. Oh! Is *that* all!

MRS. WELCH [*Hobbling back with Grandma*] Where's that grand fire you were talking about? You've been gone long enough to burn up the whole mountain. [*She sits on the rock at left above the spot where the men are making the fire.*]

MRS. BAY. It's more beautiful out there. You must all go out and look.

MRS. WELCH. Thank you. I've had enough scenery to last for the rest of my life. Why in the name of common sense don't you light the fire?

CHARLES. Who's got a match?

LEO. I have, but *only one* and it's got to do the business. Now don't breathe anybody and make a draft. [*Taking Smith's cap and handing it to Frank*] Hold this hat, Kid.

CHARLES. Hold it lower down so it'll catch quicker.

LILY. Oh, wouldn't it be awful if it doesn't light?

MRS. WELCH. For Heaven's sakes don't fool with it.

JULIE. Shall we all stand around and keep off the air?

LEO. No—keep away—keep away. Don't talk.

CHARLES. Turn it the other way, Frank. [*Frank turns the cap.*]

LEO. No you don't. Put her back.

CHARLES. I tell you the wind's coming from this way.

LEO. Maybe she is but this is *my match*. Turn that hat round the way I told you, Kid. Now hold still. [*There is a breathless pause as Leo strikes the match and they all watch.*]

MRS. BAY. What's the matter? Why don't they hurry and light the fire?

LEO. Tell the old lady to stop her conversation. [*Julie, Lily and Mrs. Welch motion to Mrs. Bay to keep quiet. They all watch the match tensely.*]

MRS. WELCH. Oh Lord, it's going out!

LEO. Hold that hat still.

CHARLES. Turn the match up.

LEO. You shut up!

FRANK. Wait—she's coming. Look out—there! Careful, there she comes.

LEO. Don't move. *Ah* there we are. Oh,—blast it! [*They all groan as the match goes out.*]

JIM. Wait, there's a spark. [*They blow the fire until it blazes up. There is a chorus of delight as the flame comes.*]

LEO. How's that for a blaze?

JULIE. It's too good to be true! Oh, isn't that splendid!

MRS. WELCH. Thank Heaven! I couldn't have held out much longer.

LEO. Come close, ladies, and get next. [*They all*

talk at once as they seat themselves round the fire—stretching out their hands and feet to it with grateful groans.]

MRS. WELCH. Why didn't somebody think of this before? Say, do you know what the best thing in the world would be right now?

THE OTHERS. What?

MRS. WELCH. A cup of coffee. [*They groan again—the mere mention of coffee making them lose their moral courage.*]

CHARLES. I could walk all the way home if I had some food.

MRS. WELCH [*Getting up stiffly*] You wouldn't be so spry about walking if you were in bedroom slippers. My feet will never come back to their natural size—never! Look at that—just look at it! [*Holding up one foot, swollen and bruised*] I don't see for the life of me how I stand it at all. I honestly do *not* see how I stand it.

JULIE [*Stretching her hands to the fire*] I know. Isn't it funny how we're doing all the things we thought were the very ones we could *not* do.

[*The Porter appears at back carrying a large basket filled with bread and ham—cups, a bottle of milk, and a coffee pot—a bucket of water and a package of coffee. He can scarcely carry his load from exhaustion and a lame knee and shoulder. His clothes are in a deplorable condition and his general appearance pathetically funny. They hail him with delight.*]

CHARLES. Look who's here! You're the hero of the day, George Washington.

LEO. Welcome to our fireside!

MRS. WELCH. My God, the coon's human. He's even brought coffee.

PORTER. Yes *ma'am*! You couldn't git nowheres without that.

MRS. WELCH [*Taking the coffee pot and coffee*] This must go right on the fire to boil.

JIM. Here's a place for it.

MRS. BAY. We mustn't spill it. Every drop is precious.

PORTER [*Taking a man's tan shoe out of one pocket and a black one out of the other and holding it out to Mrs. Welch*] Here, lady, I heard you whinin' for shoes all night. These is the best I could do.

MRS. WELCH [*Seizing the shoes*] You angel! Now isn't that sweet!—Oh let me get 'em on quick. [*Hanging on the porter's arm she kicks off the slippers and puts her feet in the shoes with many groans of pain.*] Oh, Lord, how it hurts!

PORTER [*Holding her up and helping to put the shoes on*] Dey don't exactly match, lady, but they're the best I could do.

MRS. WELCH. Match your granny! Sambo, I'd give you the biggest tip you ever had but I haven't got anything left but the gold in my teeth.

PORTER. Dat's all right lady. I ain't out fer graft this trip.

MRS. WELCH. *Everything* lost. All my jewelry gone, but I know you didn't take it, Sambo, you're a *very* honest man.

PORTER. I ain't stole nuthin' but them shoes.

MRS. WELCH. You'll go to Heaven for that. Any sign of that coffee boiling?

JIM. Not yet.

MRS. WELCH. Well, don't sit there watching the pot or it will never boil. [*Frank and Charles have emptied the baskets. Frank is cutting the bread and Charles the ham.*]

JULIE [*Bending over the baby*] Here's some milk for you, precious. Isn't she the most angelic baby in the world not to cry? Here dearest— Oh, see, she's starving. You blessed, blessed little thing. [*The women all coo to the baby.*]

FRANK. Here's a nice piece of bread and ham for everybody.

JIM. She's boiling! [*They sit about the fire helping each other with a new and exaggerated kindness.*]

LEO. I've got mine. Sambo, here's a sandwich.

SAMBO [*Modestly and very grateful for the sudden attention*] Oh, I'll sit over here.

JULIE. No—no, sit over here by the fire.

LEO. Gosh, smell that coffee! Is that the same brand I've been kicking about for four days?

MRS. WELCH [*Leaning forward eagerly*] Keep on pouring—keep on pouring!

LEO. You can pour mine right down my throat if you will. [*Deep grunts and groans express their comfort as they eat and drink and talk with their mouths full.*]

MRS. BAY. We have a great deal to be thankful for. 'Spose we offer up our thanks in a little hymn of praise. Lily you start it.

LILY. Oh, Grandma, I couldn't!

MRS. BAY. Well, then I will. [*In a sweet quaver-*

ing voice she begins "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." Charles and Frank laugh.]

JULIE. Oh, don't laugh! [*She sings softly with Mrs. Bay and gradually they all join in—at first lamely and then with honest thankfulness as the feeling grows. It swells into some discordant notes and into strains of real harmony, greatly aided by Sambo, the only one who sings with complete musical abandon. As they finish there is a long pause in which they gradually come back to self-consciousness.*]

JULIE [*Very quietly*] I've found a place for the baby.

THE OTHERS. Where?

JULIE. I'm going to keep her myself.

MRS. WELCH. What?

JULIE. Oh, you don't think I'm fit to take care of her, but I love her—and after all, love is the greatest thing in the world that can be given to her, isn't it?

SMITH. Oh, we mustn't allow her to do this.

MRS. WELCH [*Hushing Smith with a gesture and speaking to Julie*] Don't you fool with a thing like that. Why, you don't know what you're letting yourself in for. It means everything you're not used to—*sacrifices and hard things you hate. My God, it's an awful job taking care of a baby. How on earth can you do it?*

JULIE. I don't know—but I just know I can. I *must* do it. It's the reason I'm alive myself. I know that now. Think of it, Mrs. Welch, she'll need me. I'm the only thing in the world she'll know— [*Getting to her feet*] and I'll have to learn to take care of us both.

MRS. WELCH. She's bluffing—and fooling with a pretty serious thing. And what's more, if it comes to a showdown that kid belongs to all of us as much as it does to her, and we've got a right to know what's going to become of it.

JULIE. But I know this—whatever I am, however worthless and weak, I *have* got the strength to take care of this baby. Oh, let me try—I can do it and I will.—Don't you believe me?

MRS. WELCH [*With a sudden conviction and a catch in her throat*] You bet I believe you. But I want to laugh. [*Looking at Jim*] I was going to show her up to you. I thought she'd fooled you. But now I think you'd be pretty lucky to get her

JIM. I would be—the luckiest man in the world—but I haven't the slightest right in the world to ask her. [*Shouts from below.*] That means the relief train is here. Come on, Mrs. Bay. I'll take you down.

MRS. BAY. What's the matter? I don't want to go down. I want to know what's going on.

LEO. What's the matter? Why isn't he going to marry her?

MRS. WELCH. Oh, shut up! Stop talking about something you don't know anything about. [*Mrs. Welch takes the baby from Lily and puts it in Julie's arms—turning to the others.*] Look here—it's just as much our business to help take care of that kid as it is hers. I'm going to give five hundred a year. Smith, you can do better than that, how much do you say?

SMITH. Why, whatever *you* say, of course.

MRS. WELCH. A thousand will do for you to start with.

LEO. Now you're shouting.

MRS. WELCH. Now go on down everybody, we'll come in a minute. [*Leo, Smith, Charles and Frank gather round Lily and the baby.*]

MRS. WELCH [*To Julie*] I'm going to take you to ma's till we get things straightened out. She's got a big house and it will do her good to open up the windows and let in some fresh air.

JULIE. Oh—

MRS. WELCH. Don't try to talk. I know everything you want to say. Come on down. That's the first thing to do.

JULIE. I want to sit here alone just a few minutes—till I—

MRS. WELCH. I know, till you get a grip on yourself. I'm just going to take you under my wing. I don't often take a fancy to anybody—but when I *do* I stick.

CHARLES. I'll stay with her. [*To Leo*] You help Frank with Lily, will you?

LEO. Sure. [*Going quickly to help Frank make a cat's cradle for Lily and turning back to Julie as they start down the hill.*] I'll see you later. Don't you be lonely, *Julie*. You've got lots of good friends and little Leo's right on the job.

SMITH. May I offer my help in any way?

MRS. WELCH. Now the kindest thing you can do is to go on down the hill.

SMITH. But I wish to say that—

MRS. WELCH. You'll have plenty of time to say it.

I need you now. *Go on.* Oh, these blessed shoes! Hey, don't go so fast, I'm no little fleet foot.

SMITH [*Turning back to help her*] Be very cautious. Let me go first and you put both hands on my back.

MRS. WELCH. I will. *Go on.* Take good care of her, Charlie, and come down in a minute. I'll be waiting for you, Julie dear. Oh, go on! *Go on!* [*Giving Smith an impatient push.*]

CHARLES [*After a pause, kneeling beside Julie*] I wish there was something I could do.

JULIE. You're all so good.

CHARLES. I'd be so proud to marry you and help take care of the baby if you'd only let me.

JULIE. You dear boy!

CHARLES. I'd cut college and go to work right away. Won't you think about it? I'm not so young as I look.

JULIE. You dear, dear boy! How sweet you are! How kind the world is.

CHARLES. Do you want him? [*He turns as Jim appears again at the path.*] Oh—I guess I'll go down. You don't need me.

[*Charles goes off slowly down the path.*]

JIM. You will let me help you with her—won't you?

JULIE. Oh—no— That won't be necessary.

JIM. You mean you don't want—

JULIE. I shan't need you.

JIM. But if there's anything—anything in any way I *can* do—will you let me— [*She looks at him and moves up toward the path*] I won't come near you—if you don't want me to—but just to know that a friend

is over there behind that range—that's the way I can stay in your life a little, isn't it?

JULIE [*Turning*].—I'm not separated from you by anything in heaven or earth. I love you.

JIM. You can't. It's life—not me—you love.

JULIE. Then you are life—I love you.

JIM [*Closing his arms about her*]. Be sure what you are doing.

JULIE. I love you—I love you!

JIM. Oh, I'll take care of you. I don't just love you—I worship you.

[*Voices call to them as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

